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HEROIC LIFE
of
NIKOLAI
OSTROVSKY



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Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world—the fight for the Liberation of Mankind.

N i k o l a i O s t r o v s k y

for
7/12/63

S . T R E G U B

The
HEROIC LIFE
of
NIKOLAI
OSTROVSKY

("HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED")

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

СЕМЁН ТРЕГУБ
ЖИЗНЬ И ПОДВИГ НИКОЛАЯ ОСТРОВСКОГО

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
HELEN ALTSCHULER
DESIGNED BY Y. RAKUZIN

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Among the names that form the pride and glory of Soviet literature no small place belongs to that of Nikolai Ostrovsky, author of *How the Steel Was Tempered* and of the unfinished novel *Born of the Storm*.

Ostrovsky was born on September 29, 1904, in the village of Vilia, in the Ukraine. He died December 22, 1936, in Moscow. Only thirty-two years of life; and of that brief span he was desperately ill all the last twelve, and blind, too, for the last eight. It was in his last, most difficult, six years that his books were written.

This period brought out more strongly than ever Ostrovsky's inherent traits of character: his tremendous self-discipline, his power of will, breaking down all obstacles that might block the way to the aim he had set himself. The greater the difficulties that confronted him, the more persistent his struggle, his advance.

He was tempered steel—not to be shattered like glass by the great hammer of fate.

Nikolai Ostrovsky's life story forms the best commentary to his works; and his works are the best summation of his life.

CHILDHOOD—ADOLESCENCE—YOUTH

Poverty shadowed Ostrovsky's life from childhood. His father, Alexei Ivanovich Ostrovsky, working as a maltster at a distillery, never earned enough to support the family. The staff of the household was the mother, Olga Osipovna Ostrovskaya, who washed and sewed and cooked for the "gentlefolk" to keep her four children fed and clothed.

Nor were the Ostrovskys any exception. There were five hundred peasant families in Vilia, and most of them, pinch and scrape as they might, had always eaten the last remnants of their harvest by the New Year.

Around the village lay huge estates, the properties of Counts Mogelnicki and Chaplinski and of the Court physician Reyn. From dawn to dark, the peasant youth toiled in the fields. And their fathers, when times grew hard past bearing, would set out in search of work in other parts, often far from home.

Small wonder, then, that in the blaze of 1905 the landed estates at Vilia were swept by fire—and its red glow suffused the sky of Nikolai Ostrovsky's infancy.

In 1913, at the age of nine, Nikolai completed the Vilia parish school. That, for the time, was the end of his

schooling. The family had no means; and in any case, what education could a child of his lowly station expect?

In 1915, at the height of the First World War, the Ostrovskys moved from Vilia to the town of Shepetovka—a big railway junction, intersection of the Warsaw and the Kiev lines. At that period Shepetovka was not far behind the front. It was here that life's "universities" really began for Nikolai.

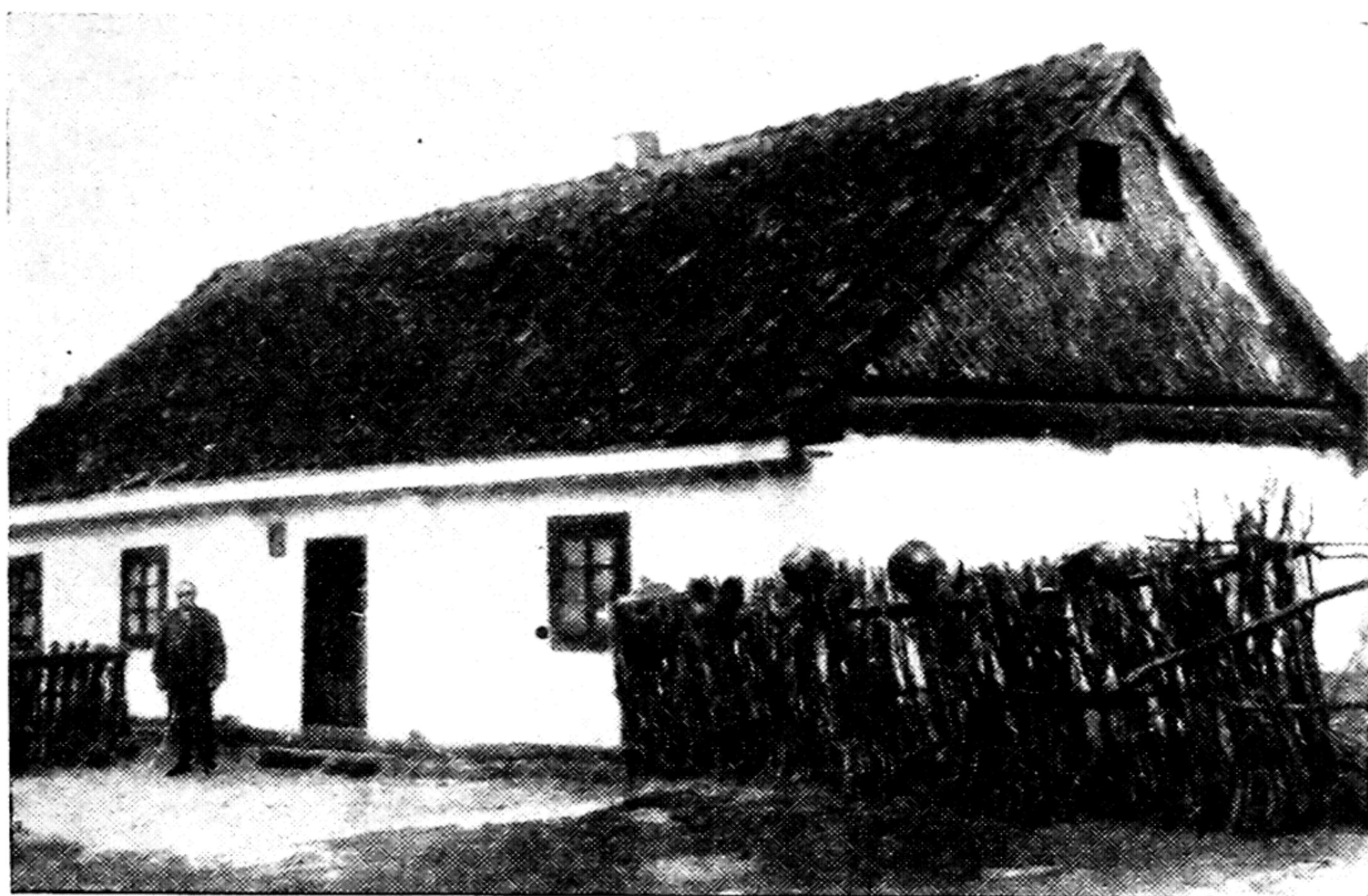
The novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* begins with a description of Pavel Korchagin's expulsion from school on the insistence of the Scriptures teacher, Father Vasily. This happened to Nikolai Ostrovsky in Shepetovka, where his mother had hoped to give him another year or two at school. Soon afterwards he was put to work as a kitchen boy at the railway station restaurant.

As time passed, Nikolai was weighed down more and more by "life's leaden abominations". He saw life from its ugly under side, "as, from a basement window, one sees the dirty boots of the passing people".

His only source of inspiration lay in books. He was a voracious reader, seeking in the printed page not only consolation, but answers to the problems that tormented him. *Giuseppe Garibaldi*, *The Gadfly*, *Taras Bulba*, *Spartacus*, Shevchenko's *Minstrel*, Stepnyak-Kravchinsky's *Andrei Kozhukhov*—such were some of his best and truest friends. "He wanted to be brave and strong, like those of whom he had read in books," he was later to write of sixteen-year-old Pavel Korchagin. How true that was of his own self!

Many years later, asked how he had come to be a writer, Ostrovsky said of this period:

"I was often dissatisfied with the characters in the stories and novels that came my way, and—reading aloud to my mother—I would unconsciously begin to



The house in which Nikolai Ostrovsky was born

improvise, reading not what was printed on the page before me, but what I should have liked to be printed there. Carried away by my fancies, I would soon get into a tangle of contradictions, and then Mother would catch me and accuse me of lying. I would be hurt and ashamed.”

Of one such occasion he said:

“I remember once, when I was twelve.... I brought home a book I’d gone to no little trouble to get.... One of the characters, I remember clearly, was an arrogant Count who amused himself by tormenting his servant, for lack of anything better to occupy his time. He did every nasty trick he could think of—flipped the man on the nose, or suddenly shouted at him until his knees shook with terror. I sat reading all this stuff to Mother, well, and I couldn’t stand it any more. And when the

Count flipped the servant's nose so hard that he dropped the tray he was carrying, instead of letting the man smile humbly and withdraw, as the author had written it, I flared up and continued the story as I would have liked it. True, the author's elegant style disappeared, and the story went on in a different sort of lingo: 'And then the servant swung around on that Count, and didn't he just punch him in the snout! And again, and again, till the Count saw stars!'

" 'Hold on, hold on,' Mother cried. 'Who ever heard of such a thing—hitting a Count!'

"The blood rushed to my face.

" 'Serves him good and right, the dirty so-and-so!' I said. 'It'll teach him how to treat a working man.'

"But Mother insisted:

" 'Who ever heard of such a thing? I don't believe it! Show me that book—there's no such words in it, I'm sure!'

"Furiously, I hurled the book to the floor and cried:

" 'Well, and so much the worse! I'd smash all his ribs for him, if it was me!'

"... And that, perhaps, may be regarded as the inglorious beginning of my literary career."

The boy Ostrovsky could not passively reconcile himself to the injustice reigning in the world around him. He protested; and his outspokenness made him enemies. Eventually, one of the waiters at the restaurant, picking on some trifling fault, beat him up cruelly; and the restaurant keeper discharged him.

Came 1917, and the February Revolution.

Reading the posters with which the town was plastered before the elections to the Constituent Assembly, Nikolai one day made the acquaintance of a Bolshevik supporter, the worker Linnik, whom he was later to portray

in the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* as the joiner Dolinnik.

After the Great October Socialist Revolution, when Soviet power was established in Shepetovka, Nikolai went to Linnik—now Chairman of the local Revolutionary Committee—to offer his services. The thin, shock-headed youngster was so eager that he could not be denied.

“I couldn’t turn him down,” Linnik recalls. “We used him simply as a message boy, at first, but later he became a special messenger for the Revolutionary Committee.”

Those were not easy times. They were times of mortal struggle, at the front and in the rear, against intervention and counter-revolution, to uphold the victory of the Revolution.

When the Shepetovka Revolutionary Committee had to go underground, Nikolai Ostrovsky reconnoitred for it, plastered up leaflets, and undertook the dangerous tasks of a special messenger. At this time he was working at the electric power station, and also studying at an advanced elementary school.

To his teacher at this school he confessed one day that he would like to be a writer, but did not know how to go about it. He wrote often for the manuscript magazine, *Blossoms of Youth*, that the pupils at the school put out—verse, stories, fairy-tales. He acted, too, in the school plays, preferring always the boldest, most heroic parts.

His interests were many and varied. But above all else in his young heart reigned the fervent urge to aid the Revolution.

Walking down the street, one day, Nikolai saw Fyodor Peredreichuk, a member of the underground Revolution-

ary Committee, under guard of an armed Petlyura gendarme. Peredreichuk, a former sailor, worked at the railway depot, and Nikolai knew him well. Decision came instantly. Nikolai threw himself on the guard, and during the struggle that followed Peredreichuk was able to escape. The boy was arrested and immediately brought up for questioning. He was beaten mercilessly, but all attempts to get information from him about the underground were vain. He did not say a word. In the end, he managed to escape.

In the spring of 1919, Soviet power was firmly established in Shepetovka. A few months later, on July 20, 1919, Nikolai Ostrovsky and his friend Sergei Bruzzhak joined the Young Communist League. The League, in those days, attracted only the most courageous of the youth. Those were times when, as Ostrovsky was later to put it, together with your membership card you were handed a rifle and two hundred cartridges. Throughout the Ukraine, the League numbered only eight thousand members. The Shepetovka unit had five members, and one of the five was Nikolai Ostrovsky.

On August 9, 1919, not quite three weeks after joining the League, Nikolai went to the front as a volunteer. He fought at first in Kotovsky's brigade, and later in the First Cavalry Army.

In the cavalry, he was immediately assigned to a scouting party. A few days later he was wounded in battle, in the district of Voznesensk. He lay almost a month in hospital, and finally left before his wound was properly healed, because he was afraid of losing track of his unit.

In 1920, Nikolai fought in the campaign against the Polish Whiteguards. For a time he was one of the Red Army guard protecting a propaganda train. Later, he

fought in the ranks of the Fourth Cavalry Division. He repeatedly distinguished himself in battle and was commended in regimental Orders of the day.

On August 19, 1920, in the vicinity of Lvov, he was again wounded, this time seriously: in the head and abdomen.

"It happened on August 19," we read in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, "during a battle in the Lvov area. Pavel had lost his cap in the fighting and had reined in his horse. The squadrons ahead had already cut into the Polish positions. At that moment Demidov came galloping through the bushes on his way down to the river. As he flew past Pavel he shouted:

" 'The Division Commander's been killed!'

"Pavel started. Letunov, his heroic commander, that man of sterling courage, dead! A savage fury seized Pavel.

"With the blunt edge of his sabre he urged on his exhausted Gnedko, whose bit dripped with a bloody foam, and tore into the thick of the battle.

" 'Kill the vermin, kill 'em! Cut down the Polish *szlachta*! They've killed Letunov!' And blindly he slashed at a figure in a green uniform. Enraged at the death of their Division Commander, the cavalrymen wiped out a whole platoon of Polish legionaries.

"They galloped headlong over the battle-field in pursuit of the enemy, but now a Polish battery went into action. Shrapnel rent the air, spattering death on all sides.

"Suddenly there was a blinding green flash before Pavel's eyes, thunder smote his ears and red-hot iron seared into his skull. The earth spun strangely and horribly about him and began to turn slowly upside down.

"Pavel was thrown from the saddle like a straw. He flew right over Gnedko's head and fell heavily to the ground.

"Instantly black night descended."

This episode in the story of Pavel Korchagin is a description of what actually happened, on that date, to Nikolai Ostrovsky.

The entry in the hospital register reads:

"Red Army man N. Ostrovsky. Admitted August 22, 1920."

This time he was two months in hospital. For many days he tossed in delirium. The doctors thought him beyond hope. But he was young and strong, and his wounds finally healed. Only—a shell splinter had injured the optic nerve, and when he left the hospital his right eye retained only four-tenths of normal vision.

The Army was now out of the question. But Ostrovsky found his place in the Cheka, in the fight against banditism.

The Civil War over, he threw himself with the same selfless fervour, with the same heroic devotion, into the struggle on the peaceful labour front, fighting to overcome the country's economic dislocation.

The whole land rang to Lenin's words at the Third Congress of the Young Communist League: "The ground has been cleared, and on this ground the young communist generation must build a communist society."

In 1921, Ostrovsky was directed by the Kiev Gubernia Committee of the League to the central repair shops of the South-Western Railway. The young people at the shops instantly recognised the new assistant electrician as a leader, and he was soon made secretary of the League unit at the shops.

"He was no older than the rest of us," writes one of his comrades of that period, "but he had fought and been wounded in the Civil War, and that gave him great prestige. And then, he was one of our own kind, and a very responsive comrade. He was greatly liked, but at the same time feared—because he never passed over bad work, or uncomradely conduct, or carelessness, no matter on whose part."

In the autumn of 1921, the people of Kiev suffered bitterly of cold. There was no fuel for the shops and factories, no fuel for the locomotives, no fuel for hospitals, schools, or homes. Firewood had to be brought in, and as quickly as possible; and to bring it in, a railway spur had to be laid to the timber workings.

The Kiev Gubernia Committee of the League sent eight hundred League members to lay the spur.

The conditions in which they had to work were incredibly difficult. Ostrovsky was later to describe their heroic effort in *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

"... It's impossible to build a line under these conditions, with the scanty equipment and labour power we have," Tokarev, in charge of the building, says to Zhukhrai and Akim. "But all the others, every last man of them, know that the line has got to be built at all costs. . . . Judge for yourselves: we've been digging here for over a month, the fourth batch of replacements are due for a rest, but the main body of workers have been on the job all the time. It's only their youth that keeps them going. But half of them are badly chilled. Makes your heart bleed to look at them. These lads are worth their weight in gold."

Persistent, unflagging effort got the job done. For Ostrovsky, it ended in serious illness—typhoid fever,

followed by a new attack of the rheumatism that had been tormenting him on and off since his boyhood.

Only in early 1922 did he return to his work at the repair shops.

At the same time, he began to study at a technical school for electricians.

But he only studied a little over two months. There was too much to be done, and not enough people to cope with it all; and his health was growing worse and worse.

He was sent for treatment to Berdyansk, a resort on the Azov Sea.

Then, his condition somewhat improved, he returned to his work in Kiev.

In late autumn of 1922 a storm wind blocked the Dnieper with loose ice, and the timber rafts so needed down in the lower reaches could not get past Kiev. The League was mobilised to clear the channel and get the rafts through. Ostrovsky, too, worked with his comrades, knee-deep in the icy water. He was severely chilled, and came down with a serious disease of the joints.

Placed in hospital, he submitted to treatment for only two weeks, then left for his old home in Shepetovka.

There his mother steamed and massaged and swathed his swollen legs. The pain grew less, but did not altogether leave him. His olive face turned sallow, and he grew thinner with every day. His Civil War injuries, too, made themselves felt.

At the age of eighteen Ostrovsky's physical condition was so bad that a medical board declared him unfit for work and assigned him a pension. But he firmly refused to accept the pension and demanded something to do.

In January 1923, after a brief course of medical treatment, he was assigned by the League to work in the



Nikolai Ostrovsky (1922)

border district of the Shepetovka Area as secretary of the District League Committee and Commissar of the local universal military training battalion.

There is a photograph dating to that period: at a table in a leafy orchard, under a faded strip of bunting stretched between two supports, a group of people seated in a semicircle. One of the group is a very young man. His face is open, resolute, and his thoughtful eyes look straight into yours. A shock of dark hair; the first faint hint of a moustache; Army tunic, cavalry breeches, Army boots. A peaked cap lying on his knees. In the holster attached to his broad belt, an Army revolver.

"I was a political functionary—secretary of a Young Communist League District Committee," he was later to say in an interview. "And that meant work from 6 a. m. to 2 a. m."

A twenty-hour working day! And the scope, the content, the responsibility of his work at the border!

There is a terse description in *How the Steel Was Tempered*:

"From saddle to desk, and from desk to the common where squads of young military trainees diligently drilled, then the club and the school and two or three committee meetings—such was the daily round of the Military Commissar of Battalion Two. Often enough his nights were spent on horseback, Mauser at his side, nights whose stillness was broken by a sharp 'Halt, who goes there?' and the pounding of the wheels of a fleeing cart laden with smuggled goods from beyond the border."

On October 27, 1923, in connection with the approaching fifth anniversary of the founding of the Young Communist League, a meeting of the Berezdov district organisation of the Communist Party accepted into the



*Nikolai Ostrovsky, Young Communist League functionary
in the border district of the Shepetovka Area (1923)*

Party ranks the finest of the younger generation; and it was only natural that Nikolai Ostrovsky, "as the most staunch and consistent of Young Communist Leaguers", was one of those admitted to candidate Party membership.

On August 9, 1924—the year of the Lenin Enrolment—Ostrovsky was confirmed by the Shepetovka Area Party Committee as a full-fledged Party member. This was an event of the greatest significance in his life.

At this time Ostrovsky was no longer at Berezdov. He had been transferred some half-year before to the backward Izyaslavl District, to head the League organisation there and improve its work.

"In the tiny room I entered," recalls an Izyaslavl League member of that period, "a young man, very pale, sat writing. He wore a faded Red Army tunic, its collar corners, where the tabs had once been, darker than the rest of the cloth, cotton trousers, and heavy Army shoes. He was the League secretary."

The "young man, very pale"—Nikolai Ostrovsky—worked with the same furious tension at Izyaslavl as at Berezdov.

Speaking at an Area League Conference on May 21, 1924, Ostrovsky urged the delegates to elect to the Area Committee only such comrades as "could themselves set an example both in their work and in their private lives". As though in response to this appeal, the conference unanimously elected him a member of the Area Committee, thus recognising his growing prestige as a League leader.

A few months later Ostrovsky was called from Izyaslavl to Shepetovka, to work as acting secretary of the League Area Committee.

In an automobile accident which overtook him during a trip on League affairs, Ostrovsky's right knee was injured. His physical condition, bad enough before the accident, now grew worse than ever.

Worn down by the cumulative effect of early poverty, war wounds, typhoid, steadily advancing rheumatism, and the years of intensive, unrelaxing work, often without an hour's rest in the twenty-four, his iron constitution had begun to betray him.

Towards the end of 1924 things became still worse. Illness dealt him blow after bitter blow, and he was threatened—at the age of twenty!—with complete disability. Now began a weary period of wanderings from clinic to sanatorium to clinic: Kharkov, Yevpatoria, Slavyansk, again Kharkov and Yevpatoria, then Novorossiisk, Kharkov, Moscow, again Novorossiisk, Sochi, again Moscow, and again Sochi.

ILLNESS. THE STRUGGLE TO RETURN TO THE RANKS

The victory over the enemies of the Revolution had brought Ostrovsky infinite happiness. But his illness had torn him out of the ranks. Illness had become the new enemy that he must conquer.

At the end of December 1924, Ostrovsky was admitted for treatment to the Medico-Mechanical Research Institute in Kharkov. He was so lame at this time that he could not walk without crutches—his “helpers”, as he called them. Extremely sensitive to the looks of pity that were liable to follow him when he tried to walk, he spent most of his time at the clinic in bed. “I was like a wolf cub, caught and caged, in those days,” he was later to write of this period.

First of all, his illness had to be diagnosed and its causes established.

The doctors came to the conclusion that he was suffering with dropsy of both knee joints. They applied the most advanced methods of treatment, but with no result. Then they operated; but that only made things worse. They proposed amputation of both legs. Ostrovsky refused. “Why, that would leave me altogether helpless,” he wrote to his brother. He still had hope. “And so, dear Father,” he wrote in a letter home, “if luck is with me, I’ll get better and come back to work in our dear Party.”



Nikolai Ostrovsky (1926)

Ostrovsky's situation was deeply tragic. Accustomed to active participation in the building of the new life, he now found himself relegated, as he expressed it, to "the hindmost lines".

1925. The whole land was gripped by a mighty process of creation, the period of preparation for that decisive effort, the First Five-Year Plan. Industry and agriculture were being built up anew, and a great cultural revolution was in progress. The youth, in their millions, were working heroically at construction such as the world had never witnessed. The more unbearable, then, for Ostrovsky his compelled inaction.

Later, in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, he was to make Pavel Korchagin write in a letter to his brother Artem:

"Can there be a greater tragedy than that of a man who combines in himself a treacherous body that refuses to obey him and the heart of a Bolshevik who passionately yearns to work, to be with all of you in the ranks of the fighters advancing along the whole front in the midst of the stormy avalanche?"

He did everything in his power to rejoin "the ranks of the fighters". Already ill, he remained an ardent propagandist. "I could speak for three hours on end, and my twenty young people would never stir until I finished. They would hardly breathe. So that the flame is there. And something to live for, too—the knowledge that I'm needed," he was later to say, recalling his talks with a group of young workers at the Novorossiisk port.

"Something to live for... the knowledge that I'm needed"—this unfailing stimulant helped Ostrovsky to endure and conquer physical suffering.

He was a splendid narrator, and his friends could sit for hours listening to his stories of the Civil War, always

so vivid and full of humour. Often, someone would say:

“Why don’t you put it on paper? It would make an interesting book!”

The same thought had occurred repeatedly to Ostrovsky himself. Gradually, it began to attract him more and more.

“I would watch your faces as you listened,” he later confessed to his wife. “I was already nursing the idea of writing down for the youth all I had been through. And, watching your reactions, I would weigh the question: Was there any sense in starting? Could I attain what I had in mind?”

Small wonder, then, that when *How the Steel Was Tempered* appeared many parts of the story were familiar to his friends.

Ostrovsky had no lack of what to say, and no doubt as to the importance of what he wanted to say. But—as he realised only too well—“You cannot write a book, of course, by the wish alone, unsupported by a high level of cultural development.” His cultural development was insufficient, and he keenly felt this shortcoming. With his native energy and persistence, he set to work to overcome it.

The years that preceded the writing of *How the Steel Was Tempered* were years of study, intensive and highly productive.

Pushkin and Gogol, Lermontov and Nekrasov, Tolstoi, Chekhov, Gorky—again and again he returned to their works, not simply reading, but analysing thought and form and method. New writers, too, began to occupy him: Furmanov and Mayakovsky, Serafimovich and Sholokhov, Fadeyev, Fedin, Vsevolod Ivanov. In translation, he read Balzac, Hugo, Zola, London, Dreiser, Barbusse.

His reaction to books, as to people, was that of the active fighter. There were books that he regarded with fierce hostility, and other books that he loved as comrades in the ranks.

"Tell me what you read and I'll tell you who you are"—that was a criterion Ostrovsky applied even to the characters in the books he wrote. Among Pavel Korchagin's favourite books we find *The Gadfly*, *Spartacus*, Furmanov's *Revolt*, and the works of Gorky.

Favourite among favourites was Gorky. Ostrovsky never tired of *Mother*, to which he returned time and again. He loved "Makar Chudra", "Chelkash", "Malva", and was altogether carried away by "The Song of the Stormy Petrel" and "The Song of the Falcon".

"How wonderfully written!" he said of "The Falcon". "Why—it's the song of winged youth, brimming over with confidence in its power to achieve, aspiring eagerly to bring about the brightest dreams of liberty, of a life of beauty. It's a veritable grenade, cast by the mighty arm of a giant fighter into the camp of obscurantism and philistinism. . . . Yes, Gorky is the first. None wrote so before him."

Repeatedly Ostrovsky read—or, to be more exact, had read aloud to him—Vladimir Korolenko's tale, *The Blind Musician*. Its theme, of course, could not but interest him: the story of a life passed in blackness such as had now overtaken him (though to Ostrovsky blindness was only a part, and not by any means the most painful part, of his physical suffering). The story may well have interested him, too, in that it was laid in his native places—in that same "South-West Territory" in which his own adolescence had passed. His childhood enthusiasms, games, and dreams—how they must have

come back to him as he lay listening to the description of that "pestiferous Volhynian", Maxim Yatsenko, who got so angry with the Austrians that he went to Italy to join up with Garibaldi, and returned to Volhynia "slashed into mincemeat". It is this old Garibaldian, Maxim, who carries on the long and persistent struggle to return blind Pyotr Popelsky to life; and his thoughts and struggle must have moved Ostrovsky deeply. Maxim Yatsenko feels it his parting mission in life "to fill his empty place in the ranks with a new fighter for life's cause".

"Who could tell?—the old Garibaldian reflected. The spear and the sword, after all, were not the only means of struggle. Some day, perhaps, this child whom fate had so unjustly slighted would turn whatever weapon he might master to the defence of other unfortunates, victims of life's injustice. And then the crippled old soldier would not have lived in vain."

Pyotr has to combat a feeling of deficiency engendered by his blindness. And he finds the road to victory in the joy of creation. He becomes a musician.

In this aspect of the story lay its kinship with Ostrovsky's inner life—a kinship accentuated by the warmth of Korolenko's intonation, by his lyricism and gentle humour.

With other aspects of the story, however, Ostrovsky could not agree.

Pyotr is embittered by his blindness. It estranges him from the people around him. And it is not Pyotr who fights this bitterness and estrangement. It is his uncle—Maxim and his mother who free him of this burden.

No, Ostrovsky was not bitter or estranged, nor did he depend on others to reconcile him with life.

And his disagreement, his debate with Korolenko's Pyotr, too, played its part in his preparation to become a writer.

In the works of Dmitry Furmanov Ostrovsky found much to his heart. He often expressed his regret that he and Furmanov had never met, never conversed (Furmanov died in 1926). Word for word, Ostrovsky remembered Commissar Furmanov's thoughts as he faces the infuriated soldiers (in the book *Revolt*): "If I must die, let even my death serve our cause. . . . This is my last mobilisation. I must meet death bravely." And this final thought, that death must be met bravely, is expressed by a character in Ostrovsky's first book, *How the Steel Was Tempered*—one of a group of Bolsheviks whom the Whiteguards have condemned to death.

Ostrovsky took a particular interest in literature devoted to the Civil War—journalism, documents, memoirs, whether collected in symposium form or published in scattered bits in periodicals.

In this period he enrolled as a correspondence student at the Sverdlov Communist University.

His self-discipline was amazing. His day was carefully planned out, and the schedule, once established, was strictly observed. Definite hours were assigned to each occupation: reading of fiction, political literature, letter-writing. At first the schedule included daily walks. Later, the walks had to be left out. A special heading in the schedule provided for "Lost Time"—breakfast, dinner, supper, rest without reading, and the like. This time Ostrovsky did his best to reduce to the barest minimum.

Such were the conditions in which, as he himself was to put it, he "mapped out his road in life", determined, deep in his heart, the course his life was to follow, his

place in the ranks. Such were the conditions in which he first approached the decision to try himself in literature. A new heading, "Writing", suddenly appeared in his schedule, to remain there always.

This was no chance development. The wealth of thoughts and observations accumulated in the course of his eager reading, fusing with his own experience, presented life to him in a new light. It threw a new light, too, on the writing profession, on the writer's place in life.

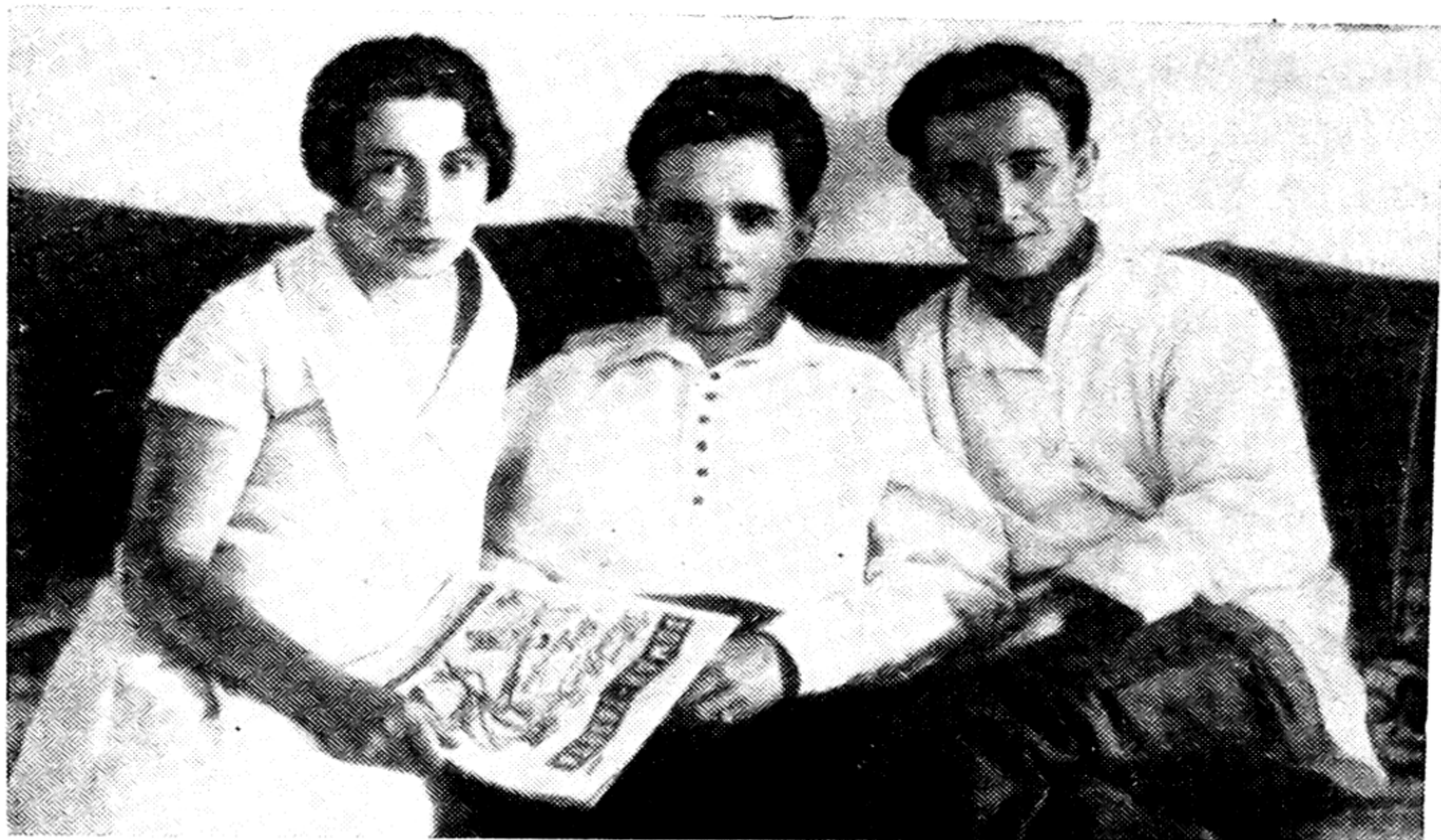
"Having mastered the art of writing, then," he was soon to say to himself, "a man, be he even blind and paralysed, can carry on with the whole people in their historic advance."

In 1927, he wrote, in a letter to a friend: "I read day and night—literally. I get all the books I want—I've joined a huge library—and I'm reading greedily."

In this same letter he made his first uncertain, half-jesting confession: "Thinking of writing—some sort of 'historico-lyrico-heroical tale'. Really, though, joking aside, I'm thinking seriously of writing. Only I don't know what will come of it."

What he had in mind was a story about the heroic Kotovsky brigade. He began this story in Novorossiisk in the autumn of 1927, and finished it early in 1928. But the manuscript was lost in the mails on its way back from Odessa, where Ostrovsky had sent it to some of his old Army comrades for their opinion. No second copy existed. A search was made, but brought no results. Ostrovsky's first work was irretrievably lost.

He did not despair. More determinedly than ever, he went about his preparations for a new attempt. It was at this period—the end of 1928—that his sight entirely failed him: one more cruel blow, raising, it might seem,



Nikolai Ostrovsky with friends (Sochi, 1929)

an insuperable obstacle to all his plans. But to a real Communist, what obstacle can be insuperable?

First and foremost in his schedule, as before, was literature. Only now he could not read himself. Others read aloud to him: Young Communist Leaguers ("It's good for them as well as me"), his family, his friends. "My greeting to every newcomer," he wrote in 1929, "is, 'Read to me!' And they read, read till their tongues begin to trip. Hastily, insatiably, I drink in all that I've been missing. 'Read!' is my slogan for all."

Despite all difficulties, Ostrovsky sought the knowledge he so needed, and acquired this knowledge. Meeting him at a sanatorium in the summer of 1930, an old friend, I. P. Fedenev, immediately noted that this "impassioned agitator, trained in the hard school of struggle", had acquired a wealth of knowledge, had "grown into a Soviet, Bolshevik intellectual".

In the winter of 1930-1931, in his room in Myortvy Pereulok (now N. Ostrovsky Pereulok), Moscow, Ostrovsky set to work on the task he had so dreamed of: the writing of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

The road he had chosen, the plan he had worked out for a return to life, was clear. The doctors were powerless to halt the process of destruction which had seized upon his body. Never again was he to get up out of his bed, to see, to walk. Well, and what of that? He had found the way out. He would stride forward into life from the pages of his book.

He knew well, had long known, what he wanted to write. It was to be a book for the younger generation, the story of a fighter of the Revolution whom no trials, no difficulties had been able to daunt—the story of Pavel Korchagin, “a worker lad I knew”, written to rally a new generation of Korchaginities.

THE WRITING OF "HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED"

Ostrovsky's strength was ebbing. He must make haste, lest some new misfortune cut short his life before his plan could be fulfilled.

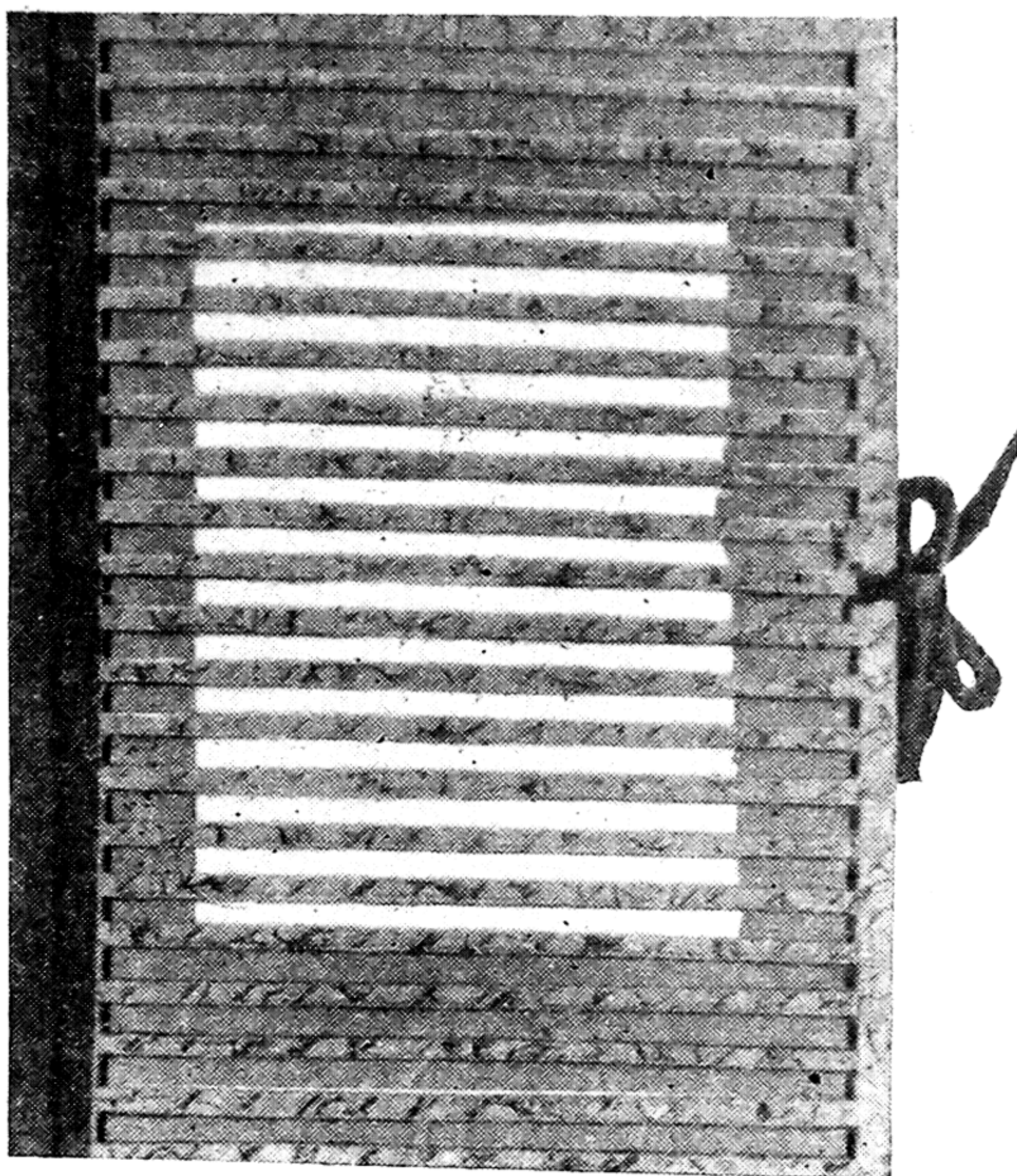
"I must launch my attack," he said to his wife. And to his friends he wrote: "I'm full of the urge to write my *How the Steel Was Tempered*." Nor was this a complaint, an appeal for sympathy. It was the battle cry of a fighter beset by difficulties and plunged into furious combat with them.

His difficulties were many.

How is one to write without recourse to thoughts and observations jotted down as they come to mind in some notebook or memorandum book? Without drawing up a first rough draft? Without leafing back the pages, returning again and again to one and the same passage? Without careful choice of words and polishing of forms, setting down various possibilities and poring over them?

Ostrovsky realised only too well that "thoughts can never be expressed so clearly when they must be written down by other hands than your own.... There are thoughts, there are conceptions, that only your own hand can express." And this most essential need of the writer was denied him.

There are pages from Ostrovsky's manuscripts on display at the Ostrovsky memorial museums in Moscow, Sochi, and Shepetovka.



*The stencil that was devised to help
Ostrovsky in his writing*

At first he had no one to help him. Gripping a pencil in his stiff, almost unbending fingers, he would painfully draw letter by unseen letter. Often, a line would turn up over the preceding line and both would be lost.

Then an appliance was devised to help him.

It was a simple contrivance enough: an ordinary cardboard folder, with parallel slits, about eight millimetres high, cut across the upper lid. Paper would be put inside the folder, and the slits served to guide the pencil so that each written line came out straight and distinct.

Most of Ostrovsky's writing, at this period, was done by night. Before going to bed his wife or mother would put some twenty-five or thirty sheets of paper into the folder, and sharpen him several pencils. When morning came there was seldom a sheet of paper left unused.

During the day, the night's work would be carefully deciphered and copied out by family and friends.

Later, he had volunteer secretaries, to whom he could dictate instead of writing by himself.

Actually, however, this eased the difficulty of his work only very slightly. His was an almost unexampled situation. But to the aid of inspiration came perseverance and endurance such as only true talent can muster. Also, Ostrovsky had a tenacious memory for people, dates, events, which he could restore in his imagination to vivid life.

Such was the long and painful process of his writing, hastened always by the fear lest the finest, the most wonderful of the pictures raised by memory disappear before they could be set down; lest the most vital of his thoughts fail to reach the reader.

He wrote of Pavel Korchagin:

"He had to remember everything he wrote, word by word. The slightest interruption caused him to lose the thread of his thoughts and retarded his work.

"Sometimes he had to recite aloud whole pages and even chapters from memory, and there were moments when his mother feared that he was losing his mind."

Ostrovsky did not lose his mind. But it is to be doubted whether any writer in the world has had to suffer such torment in the creative process as he. Heine, true, was confined to his "*Matratzengruft*" for the last ten years of his life. He, too, lost his sight and the use of his

limbs. But those ten years, after all, had been preceded by almost fifty years of life and thirty of creative work, years that had included the Universities of Bonn, Göttingen, and Berlin; travel in Italy and France; *The Book of Songs*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Atta Troll*; meetings and friendship with Marx—a full and happy life. Whereas Ostrovsky, at twenty-five, was only beginning a new stage in his life—was only approaching the gateway to literature, carrying in his heart one of the most optimistic books that the world has ever known.

“My chief method of struggle is work,” Ostrovsky was fond of saying. That applies to all periods of his brief, but eventful life. And particularly it applies to the years that followed upon his decision to become a writer.

At first Ostrovsky planned to write his book in the form of reminiscences, limiting himself strictly to what had actually happened in his life. Later, however, his plans changed and broadened. His friends advised him to write a novel, rather than reminiscences—to present his true story in the form of fiction; and he decided to follow this advice.

“‘Those of you who came to my house to be examined before the Easter holidays, stand up!’”

Setting down these opening lines of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Ostrovsky came at once to grips with the task that faced him. In a novel, it is not only content that matters. The content of a novel must be highly organised; it must be well-knit, dynamic, charged with emotion.

Memories rose in his mind—people, places, events; childhood, adolescence, youth. There could be no putting all of them into one book. And, after all, was that really necessary? The thing he must learn to do was

to distinguish what was really essential, what was really of significance to all, from what was secondary, petty, purely personal—what, for all its interest to him, might be of no interest or value to others.

He did not want his book to impress the reader simply as the story of one individual life—the biography of a League member named Nikolai Ostrovsky. No—art, to convince, must learn to generalise, to bring out the typical, the characteristic.

But did that mean that the novelist must turn his back on actual life, on real people and events, on all that he had witnessed, all that he himself had taken part in? No, of course not. It is in actual life that the typical, the characteristic, have their being. And it is the artist's duty to find them there and to bring them out in his works. Nor is such generalisation a task upon which the artist works alone. Life itself is the crystal-liser—life, the source of all art. Was not Ostrovsky himself a typical representative of his environment, of his generation? Need he seek far for prototypes of his Korchagin?

Ostrovsky did not want to invent. He kept to the facts. But the facts hampered him. Again and again he recalled Gorky's articles—"Beginners in Literature", "How I Learned to Write", "Letters to Beginners in Literature".

"The art of writing," Gorky wrote, "the art of creating characters and 'types', calls for imagination, intuition, 'invention'." Ironically, he remarked, "It is no good roasting a chicken in its feathers. You must learn to pluck a fact of its unessential feathering, to extract its meaning."

And, after reflection, Ostrovsky would admit that he must allow himself more freedom in his treatment of

facts, must allow himself what Gorky termed "invention".

In his mind he drew up a detailed plan of his book. It was to be written in two parts. The first, consisting of nine chapters, would begin with his childhood—before the Revolution—and end with the conclusion of the Civil War. The second would bring Korchagin's life up to the time of the writing of the book.

It is no simple thing—the writing of a novel. Plot, composition, the struggle of conflicting interests; character portrayal, individual traits and lines of conduct; literary style and the endless quest of the right word, weighty, precise, laconic, expressive—these problems are not lightly solved. What literary experience had Ostrovsky behind him? None whatever. Nothing to guide him but the books that he had read. Many of these were very dear to him; but it was a book of his own that he had now to write, a new book, unlike any already written.

"Why are you frowning, Comrade Korchagin? It is good, isn't it?" young Galya Alexeyeva, Korchagin's first volunteer "secretary", asks in *How the Steel Was Tempered*. And Korchagin answers:

"No, Galya, it is bad."

"The pages he did not like"—the book goes on—"he rewrote himself. Hampered by the narrow strip of the stencil, he would sometimes lose his patience and fling it from him. And then, furious with life for having robbed him of his eyesight, he would break his pencils and bite his lips until the blood came."

How often Ostrovsky himself had bit his lips until the blood came, while dictating his book to that same Galya Alexeyeva!

1931 was a year of fevered labour. Even before the first part of the book was done, he sent bits of it to his friends for judgement. Only in October were the nine chapters of Part One finally completed.

"Well, Galya," Ostrovsky said, "if the book is accepted we'll have a party, you and I, to celebrate our joint victory. And we'll get drunk, too—you on a glass of wine, and I on a glass of Seltzer water. Only I must warn you that the critics will be coming down on my poor, inadequate creation on every side. Though that doesn't alarm me. For one thing, criticism helps a person to correct his mistakes; for another, it teaches the inexperienced, and for a third—it's a bad book that no one has a word to say about."

At times the thought would come that, perhaps, his manuscript had already been relegated to the editorial waste-paper basket. That—he would reflect with unrelenting frankness—would be the end. It would mean that he could no longer be of any use, in any way. But if he were only given hope, the slightest hope, that his book might be accepted, even if it required radical reworking, why, he would work it over again, again, and yet again—any number of times. And he would win out in the end. Yes—it might take him five years, ten years, to do it, but the banner of his new life would be unfurled.

Ostrovsky was not conceited. He had no inclination to overestimate his work. His attitude towards his book was highly critical, and what he demanded of his friends was their frank, honest, exacting judgement.

"I've been seriously ill, only climbed out of it a few days ago," he wrote to his friend A. A. Zhigareva on October 25. "My physical condition was a leaden drag on Chapter Nine. The chapter hasn't come out as I

wanted it to. It was meant to be broader, fuller, yes, and altogether more vivid. But, Shurochka, has there ever been a comrade, even one, who did his writing in such conditions as I? Surely not!"

And, at the end of this letter:

"I am very critical of my work. It has many shortcomings. But, after all, it's my first piece of work. If it isn't condemned with bell and book, if it turns out to be of any literary value, that will be a revolution in my life."

To Rosa Lyakhovich he wrote:

"Talk of self-criticism! I asked you, didn't I: tell me where it's bad, and what is bad; abuse it, mock at it, hurl scorn at it; criticise mercilessly every wooden turn of phrase, all that is strained, dull, dead; pull it up by the roots. But you—you hold your tongue. You haven't the Bolshevik courage to say your thoughts. I don't know how I'm to forgive you that.... Yes, little girl, you deserve to be spanked. I'm very angry."

This was not affectation. Ostrovsky's modesty was genuine. He was prepared to see his inexperienced work annihilated by the experts; and he was even ready to justify such annihilation—so high were his demands on literature. What concern was it of the reader's who had written a book, and under what circumstances? Quality—there was the only criterion.

He was tormented by doubts. Would *The Steel* be published? Why were his friends so slow to respond? Were they simply reluctant to hurt his feelings, because he was ill?

He wrote to A. A. Zhigareva, on January 13, 1932:

"I suppose the publishers have turned me down, and you haven't the heart to tell me. Don't be upset. It's what I expected, after all."

He was not far wrong. Zhigareva, having read through the manuscript, took it at once to the Leningrad State Publishing House. The publishers promised to have the book reviewed as soon as possible. But month followed month, and no answer came. In Moscow, I. P. Fedenev took a copy of the manuscript to the *Molodaya Gvardia* (Young Guard) Publishing House, in connection with the country-wide review of Young Communist League literature then in progress. Here the book was not held up. But the publishers' reader reported that "the characters are unreal", and that, consequently, "the manuscript cannot be recommended for publication". It was a long time before Fedenev could make up his mind to tell Ostrovsky of this.

"However," he writes, "I remembered what Nikolai had said: that the most bitter truth was dearer to him than the most sugared lie. He hated it when things were kept from him. And so I decided to tell him how things stood. There was no need for me to comfort him. On the contrary, much to my amazement, he did his best to comfort me. 'So many people have begun to write nowadays,' he said, 'and every one of them wants to be published. If my manuscript has been turned down, it must be really bad. I'll have to set to work on it again, and make it better. Victory is never easy.'"

Then messages of encouragement and support began to come, not only from friends, but—among the first—from the Young Communist Leaguers of his childhood home, Shepetovka. In December 1931 Ostrovsky's brother came from Shepetovka to visit him, and brought the news that chapters from the book had been read at a League meeting there and had been approved.

"Such contradictions," Ostrovsky wrote at that time. "So much bitterness, and at the same time such hopes

of a useful and creative life. It is so pleasant, heart-warming, that young people in the town of which I write pass resolutions approving my work."

Heart-warming, too, was A. A. Zhigareva's letter in response to the chapters she had read. To this letter Ostrovsky replied:

"You don't know, dear Shura, how my heart began to beat when it was read to me. I keep asking myself—can it really be that happiness is holding out its hand to me, and [I'm] coming back again from the depths of the archives into the ranks of the army in the field? Can it really be that this youngster—that I will manage to repay my Party some fraction, at least, of the debt I owe it? That I can stop spending my days in useless idleness? And I keep checking myself. 'Be still, youngster,' I tell myself. 'Don't get excited. Life is liable to hit out again, to punish you for dreaming.' And so, to make the blow easier to bear, I won't let myself believe that I've succeeded. Facts are the only thing life will let me put my faith in."

The one decisive fact he would allow himself to put his faith in, the one thing that could convince him that happiness was holding out its hand to him, would be the publication of his book.

In his eagerness "to repay my Party some fraction, at least, of the debt I owe it", Ostrovsky wrote to the Shepetovka newspaper *Put Oktyabrya* (*Road of October*), offering to consult a literary group among the youth. His offer was accepted, and soon he received his first batch of verse and stories for criticism and advice. Out of the materials that went through his hands the newspaper began to carry a regular "literary page".

Ostrovsky devoted himself wholeheartedly to this work. A beginner in literature himself, he was very

gentle and considerate towards the young people whose work was sent him.

In the meantime, Fedenev had demanded a second reading of the novel, and the publishers had agreed. The manuscript was given, this time, to Mark Kolosov, assistant editor of the *Molodaya Gvardia* magazine.

Struck by Ostrovsky's biography, Kolosov was even more deeply struck by Ostrovsky's novel. He found it a work of tremendous moral force, a greatly needed work for Soviet readers.

And so, with Fedenev, he went to see Ostrovsky. Here is his description of this visit:

"On a long, narrow camp bed lay a young man of perhaps twenty-eight, thin beyond all belief. His face looked the more wasted in that his head was rather large, and his forehead, beneath a shock of thick, dark hair, was broad and high. Though he was blind, his brown eyes seemed to see. They had warmth and lustre, and a look of friendly interest, rather than that strained, glassy immobility more usual to the blind. His body lay unmoving, yet I could sense his impulse to rise in greeting. His face lit in a smile in which I seemed to read at once goodwill, and curiosity, and alert interest, and—behind all else—the effort that it cost him to repress his pain. He held out his thin, damp hand. I gave him mine. He gripped it firmly and, all the time that I sat there beside him, kept it in his....

"I spoke at once of his manuscript, with no preliminary talk or questions. He gripped my hand more firmly still. His smile faded and his lips pressed tight together. He was all attention, missing not a word of what I had to say, pressing my hand at the points that were most vital to him.

"At length the talk turned to practical problems: Could Ostrovsky correct his manuscript himself, or would someone else have to do that for him? He rejected the idea of such assistance. And I realised that I was dealing with a real writer."

Ostrovsky himself prepared the manuscript for publication. The publishers were amazed by his capacity for work.

During February and March of 1932 he suffered two attacks of croupous pneumonia. For twelve long days he tossed in high fever. But when Anna Karavayeva, editor of the *Molodaya Gvardia* magazine, came to visit him, it was not sympathy he sought of her, but concrete indications as to what and where in his manuscript required improvement.

"Nikolai inquired eagerly," she writes, "as to the impression his characters had made on us.

" 'Pavka—to my mind, he's not a bad fellow at all,' he said to me, half jestingly, his white teeth flashing in a smile. 'I could never deny, of course, that Nikolai Ostrovsky and Pavka Korchagin are the closest of friends. Blood of my blood, the product of my mind—that same Pavka. But the thing that bothers me is, whether my novel doesn't seem more like simple autobiography. The story of just one life, I mean to say. Eh?'

"His smile suddenly faded, and he compressed his lips. His face became stern.

"I answered that so far as that was concerned he had nothing to fear.

" 'Let one thing be understood,' he broke in quietly. 'There's no need to reassure me simply out of human kindness. I can be told everything, frankly, bluntly. I'm

a soldier, after all. Rode in the ranks when I was still a youngster. And I can still hold my seat.'

"And though his lips quivered, and his smile was soft and apologetic, I suddenly realised with utter clarity his strength of will, his inflexible determination. And I was infinitely happy that I could bring him pleasure by my answer.

" 'So you think my Pavka will be liked?' he asked, in an eager half-whisper. His happy smile was like a sunbeam, lighting up his face. A warm flush rose to his cheeks. 'You think he'll be liked? And the other young folk too? Then Comrade Ostrovsky doesn't live in this world in vain! He's begun to be of use again to the Party and the League!'

"We were friends by now, and our talk turned often to other topics; but invariably it came back again to the book."

Victory, so long awaited, came at last. The issue of *Molodaya Gvardia* dated April 1932, containing verse by Bezimensky and Gusev, prose by Willi Bredel and Maté Zalka, the reminiscences of Gustave Isnard, a veteran of the Paris Commune, and articles by Lunacharsky and Fadeyev, carried also the first instalment of a novel headed:

"N. Ostrovsky. *How the Steel Was Tempered.*"

RETURN TO THE RANKS

Part One of *How the Steel Was Tempered* appeared in the *Molodaya Gvardia* magazine in five instalments, from April to September 1932. In view of the paper shortage, however, the magazine text of the novel was somewhat abridged.

In December of the same year Part One was published in book form.

From summer 1932 to the middle of 1933, Ostrovsky was hard at work on Part Two of his novel.

Through this period, as before, his health went through many ups and downs. We can trace these through his letters. Like a temperature chart, they record his drops and rises, his steady effort, his determined struggle.

1932. April.

"This stupid illness has put off my work on the second part of *How the Steel Was Tempered*."

June.

"I'll most likely be leaving for Sochi soon, for sanatorium treatment.... I've begun coughing blood, and I'm very weak physically.... On the literary front, everything gladdens me, summons me to life, to work. Everything calls on me to hurry, to work at a pressure of a hundred thousand volts. I hate all these ailments like a class enemy."

August.

"Out in the fresh air all day, under some oak-trees. I've started working again."

October.

"My life lies in my work and in my friends....

"I've grown grimmer. This life of ours demands great power of will, persistence, faith in a better, a great, bright, soon-to-be-awaited future. That lacking, come depression and gloom."

December.

"I've already written a quarter of the second book, trying hard for quality."

In another letter:

"Persistence—that's my own weapon against all obstacles. And obstacles are legion. The days are grim and hard, but my whole life, my whole store of energy, is devoted to my book. I even write myself, by my own hand.... I live in haste... I must get my book written, while my heart still beats."

In still another:

"My desire to work is inversely proportional to the possibilities of working. And still—there's definite progress.... I keep persistently alive, in spite of all the doctors' predictions of death and disaster. I even laugh, sometimes. The learned medicos leave one thing out of account—the quality of the material their patient is made of. And that quality is what saves me.... 'Hearts that are dynamos—they can't but win,' Pavka Korchagin declared in his fervent speech in 1921. And that applies to me, too."

1933. January.

"My health betrayed me for a while, and kept me feverish. Caught cold. Not a line in 20 days. Now I'm back at work."

February.

"Working intensely."

March.

"I'm working honestly, that is, putting all the physical power I can muster into my work. Writing Chapter Five.... My strength is burning out faster than I would like."

April.

"Trying to work conscientiously. Finishing Chapter Seven."

May.

"My life consists in the writing of Part Two. I'm working 'night shift'. Go to sleep at dawn.

"It's quiet at night, not a sound anywhere. Events pass before me as in the cinema, and whole scenes and portraits stand out clearly."

June.

"I've finished and sent off to Moscow all of the second book of *How the Steel Was Tempered*—330 typewritten pages. And I'm tremendously tired. Trying to sleep off all those sleepless nights."

Part Two was written in Sochi. Undermined by the strain of his work on Part One, Ostrovsky's health in the spring of 1932 had so deteriorated that the central medical board of the Party Central Committee had insisted on his immediate departure for the South. He underwent treatment at a sanatorium, and after that, on the advice of the sanatorium doctors, remained in Sochi.

And it was here, one December day—one of those warm, damp days that constitute winter on the Black Sea coast—that Ostrovsky's dream came true. Part One of *How the Steel Was Tempered* came out in book form, and Ostrovsky's mother brought him home a pile of author's copies.

A copy was put into his hands. With eager, searching fingers he felt the binding, and tried the quality of the paper. Then his fingers encountered the design stamped on the front cover. His blind eyes widened. Again and again he traced the contour: something long and narrow, slanting across the cover. His brows drew together in tense concentration. He seemed hardly to believe what his fingers told him.

"Is it a bayonet?" he asked finally.

Yes, it was a bayonet, in gleaming silver, slanting across a steel-grey background.

"How fitting, Lev," he exclaimed to his friend Lev Bersenev, who was in his room at the time. "It's my own bayonet—my new weapon, that makes it possible for me to fight on together with you all, with the Party, with all my country, in the ranks of the fighters for socialism!"

He was happy beyond all measure. Repeatedly he asked his friends to describe the book to him—the cover, the paper, the type. He asked the name of the artist who had illustrated it, planning to write to him.

That evening Ostrovsky drew up a list of the friends to whom he wished to give copies of his book. The list began with "Mother". Then he dictated inscriptions, and signed each with his own hand.

Next day he asked to have the whole book read aloud to him. Listening, he experienced a feeling of tremendous moral satisfaction—not unmingled, however, with vexation. The editor, at times, had cut too cruelly; and there were a number of bad misprints. And the story itself—no, he had not set it all forth as well as he would have wished. The second part must be done far better, far more vividly.

After a brief rest he set to work again. Of a morning he would be carried out of doors, on a light wicker couch, and settled in the shade of the trees in the yard. Even on hot days it was cool and pleasant here.

In February 1933 Ostrovsky made the acquaintance of Mikhail Karlovich Pavlovsky, head doctor of the Sochi district hospital.

Ostrovsky's attitude towards the medical profession was one of easily understandable mistrust. At times his people would call a doctor to see him without asking his permission. This always displeased him. "You called him—he can examine you. I don't need him," he would grumble. And in a book which he gave to one of the Sochi doctors he wrote on the fly-leaf, "From one who never has been and never will be a model patient".

But Doctor Pavlovsky was a different matter. From the first, Ostrovsky trusted him unquestioningly, and he was soon one of the young writer's closest friends and counsellors.

"To Mikhail Karlovich Pavlovsky, in memory of his persistent efforts to bring this reckless fellow new lease of life"—Ostrovsky wrote in his own hand in the copy of *How the Steel Was Tempered* which he gave his doctor. Lovingly, he spoke of him as "that grey-haired youth".

Pavlovsky was not only a physician in whom Ostrovsky put his faith; he was not only a friend. A man of encyclopaedic knowledge, of broad experience, of keen and lively intellect, with the artist's ever-youthful spirit, he was to Ostrovsky a veritable "domestic university", an unfailingly interesting companion.

Pavlovsky had studied not only medicine, but also law and music. He drew and painted, and wrote now and again for the newspapers. He had served as a regimental

surgeon in the Russo-Japanese War, and as senior surgeon of an artillery brigade during the First World War. In the Civil War—and this particularly endeared him to Ostrovsky—he had fought in the ranks of the Red Army and of different partisan detachments. He had met Lenin, Frunze, Dzerzhinsky.

Doctor and patient exchanged memories of Army days and battles fought. They discussed literature and art. Pavlovsky would talk of books that he had read (he had accumulated a library of some three thousand volumes); he would read aloud, play piano arrangements of opera scores, sing arias.

In those months Ostrovsky worked with particular intensity. Before, he had had only one resource in the grim battle against his illness: his inextinguishable hope for a return to the ranks; and with that hope he had succeeded in beating off the attacks of death. Now, his hopes realised, his place in the ranks won; now, inspired by victory, the power of life within him was stronger, more confident than ever. Knowing how his readers valued this new weapon that he had forged for himself, that had returned him to the ranks, he was eager, impatient for still greater activity. His work had been recognised. It was needed, useful, valuable. His struggle, his battle with death, had not been in vain. Eighty per cent of the printing of his book had been immediately bought up by the Red Army Political Administration, for the use of the Army. The magazine *Kniga—Molodyozhi* (*Books for the Youth*), in a review entitled, “A Contribution to Young Communist League Literature”, had described the book as one of tremendous, fascinating interest, and recommended it for wide circulation among the youth. Similar opinions had appeared in *Molodaya Gvardia* and in the magazine *Rost* (*Growth*). Ostrov-

sky's friends had heartily approved the book, and were expecting its continuation.

In June 1933 Ostrovsky completed the rough draft of Part Two. This time, however, he was in no hurry to publish. He continued to work on the manuscript, improving, revising, entirely redoing whole pages and chapters. His persistent study was having its effect. He knew more, now, and had gained in skill; and his demands upon himself had increased immeasurably.

"I realise," he wrote, "that Part Two is not what I would like to see it, and unquestionably, when I am strong enough, I will rework it thoroughly."

Oppressed by this realisation, he did everything humanly (and superhumanly) possible to improve his work.

In May 1934, in connection with plans for a translation of *The Steel* into Polish, he outlined some of the improvements he wished to make.

With each new edition he worked again over the text, revising, pruning, developing.

As a member of the Sochi Party organisation, Ostrovsky carried on regular Party propaganda activities, heading the district council for cultural work and leading a literary study group.

The literary group, at its weekly meetings, acquainted its members with the latest works of Soviet and foreign literature, and read and discussed manuscripts submitted by its members, and also literary criticism published in *Pravda* and in the literary magazines.

The subject to be discussed at a given meeting was generally designated beforehand, so that the members of the group could read and prepare. Sometimes one of the members would be asked to prepare a brief report, or critical review. In such cases the meeting would

begin with this report. Then would follow general discussion.

"At the end of our meetings," one of the group members recalls, "Ostrovsky generally took the floor. We would all come to attention, drinking in every word. And that was only natural, because what he had to say was always keen, vivid, original, and tremendously meaty. His estimation and criticism of the work under discussion would be put in clear-cut, graphic, crystallic form, synthesising the other opinions expressed at the meeting."

In December 1933 Ostrovsky wrote:

"How I've spent the last three months, you ask. Well—I've stolen a great deal of time from my literary studies, and given it to the youth. Instead of a lone hand, I've become a worker among the masses. The bureau of the Party Committee meets in my rooms. I'm leading a Party study circle, and I've been made chairman of the district council for cultural work. In a word, I've got thoroughly involved in practical Party activities, and become rather a useful fellow. True, I spend a vast amount of energy on it. But life is so much happier this way! League youngsters always around me. And all the work there is to do, on the cultural front! Take the city libraries—badly neglected, with miserly budgets, and chaos on their shelves and in their catalogues. Now they're coming to life and beginning to serve their purpose. I've organised a literary group, and lead it to the best of my ability. The Party and League committees are very helpful and attentive to me and to my work. The leading Party members often visit me. I have my finger on the pulse of life. Yes, I've spent these months on practical work with a very definite aim in mind. I want

to get the feel of the time, of what's going on around me now, today."

In October 1933, in connection with the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Young Communist League, the Sochi League organisation issued Ostrovsky a new membership card. "The Sochi Leaguers have taken me back into their ranks," he wrote to his friends.

His life was full and brimming over. And he counted himself "one hundred per cent fit".

During the months he described as "spent on practical work", Ostrovsky did not give up his reading, which in this period included, among other books, Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin* and Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, Fadeyev's *Last of the Udeghe* and Turgenev's *A Nest of the Gentry*.

He worked tirelessly to prepare himself for the new book he was planning. "With the New Year," he wrote, "I launch an offensive."

Illness did its best to stop this offensive. In the spring of 1934 Ostrovsky's life hung by a hair. "It was only by the most desperate effort," Dr. Pavlovsky recalls, "that we managed to keep him alive." Worse than his physical suffering to Ostrovsky, as always, was the realisation that his powers were waning, that his literary plans were in danger of frustration. And, as always, no sooner did he begin to feel the least bit better than he set to work harder than ever, hastening to catch up on lost time.

"I'm studying stubbornly, persistently," he wrote at this period. "People read to me as long as they are able to read and I to listen. The outlines of my new book are sketched, and I'll soon start work on it. In the meantime—study and again study. For it is only by growth that a person can advance. Marking time—that is death. People look on me as a journeyman now, not a raw

apprentice, and so—study, study, till my head goes round.”

That spring A. S. Serafimovich, vacationing in Sochi, came to visit Ostrovsky, and a friendship grew up between the well-known Bolshevik writer and the youthful “journeyman”. Ostrovsky often afterwards recalled these visits, speaking of Serafimovich with filial gratitude.

“Alexander Serafimovich has been three times to see me,” he wrote in one letter. “The old man gave me a detailed analysis of my mistakes and achievements. This is a very, very useful thing to me. A. S. made a wonderful impression on me.”

It was at this time, too, that Ostrovsky made the acquaintance of the Hungarian writer Maté Zalka, with whom he quickly found much in common—both having fought in the Civil War, and both being blessed with indomitable spirit and with a love of humour.

“This Hungarian cannot help but be my friend,” Ostrovsky declared of Zalka. “With him for company, even death wouldn’t be a bore.”

Zalka was later to be portrayed as the “daredevil Hungarian, Lieutenant Sajno”, in *Born of the Storm*.

As to Zalka, he was still more deeply impressed by his new friend. Recalling his first visit to Ostrovsky, he was later to write:

“My first meeting with Nikolai was not like a first acquaintanceship. It was a meeting of close friends, of people who had long known one another. From our first words, we seemed to be continuing a conversation long since begun and left unfinished.

“The impression Ostrovsky made on me was one of the sharpest contrasts. But, above all, it was cheering, heartening. All this business of his lying flat on his

back, bedridden, blind, and all the rest—that's only on the surface. In real truth he is strong, courageous, a fighter. Yes, he still bears himself like a Red Army man. He feels that he marches in the ranks. And he is in the ranks, yes, in the very fore. This physical state of his—it seems trifling, incidental: a little sad, perhaps, but not permanent, not unconquerable, not by any means final."

Ostrovsky was blind, paralysed. Yet—"a blazing torch of activity", Romain Rolland called him. And Rolland was right. Ostrovsky was a torch that never paled, that flared only the fiercer, the brighter, when the cruel head winds swooped down upon him.

Suffering could not clip the wings of his optimism, could not rob life, for him, of its vivid colour. It taught him only to value the more highly "the type of man who is capable of enduring suffering without exhibiting his pain to all and sundry."

Visiting Ostrovsky, hearing his inspired talk, following the eager flight of his broad, searching mind, you would forget that you were at the bedside of a hopeless invalid. Never, in any way, would he remind you that he was ill. "When I shut my eyes," he would say—and you would forget that his eyes had been blind for many years past. Or he might speak of "this confounded 'flu'"—and you would have the feeling that the 'flu was all that ailed him. Blind, he would say, "I read"; barely able to move a finger, he would say, "I write"; paralysed, he would say, "I'm planning to go." Blind physically, he was keener of sight than many who could see; paralysed—more mobile than many who had the use of their limbs; hopelessly ill, he radiated such cheer, such energy, such human warmth that people at his bedside felt ashamed, somehow—as though it were they who were ill, and not Ostrovsky.

Of his own possible death, he once said to the author of these lines:

“If they tell you, ‘Nikolai is dead,’ don’t you believe them until you come and see for yourself. But if I really do turn out to be down, don’t write, as they like to write in death notices, ‘He might have lived longer’. Let me tell you: if even a single cell in my body could have lived on, have continued to resist, I would be alive, would be resisting.... I won’t go until I’m absolutely annihilated. I’ll show that old witch, Death, how Bolsheviks die.”

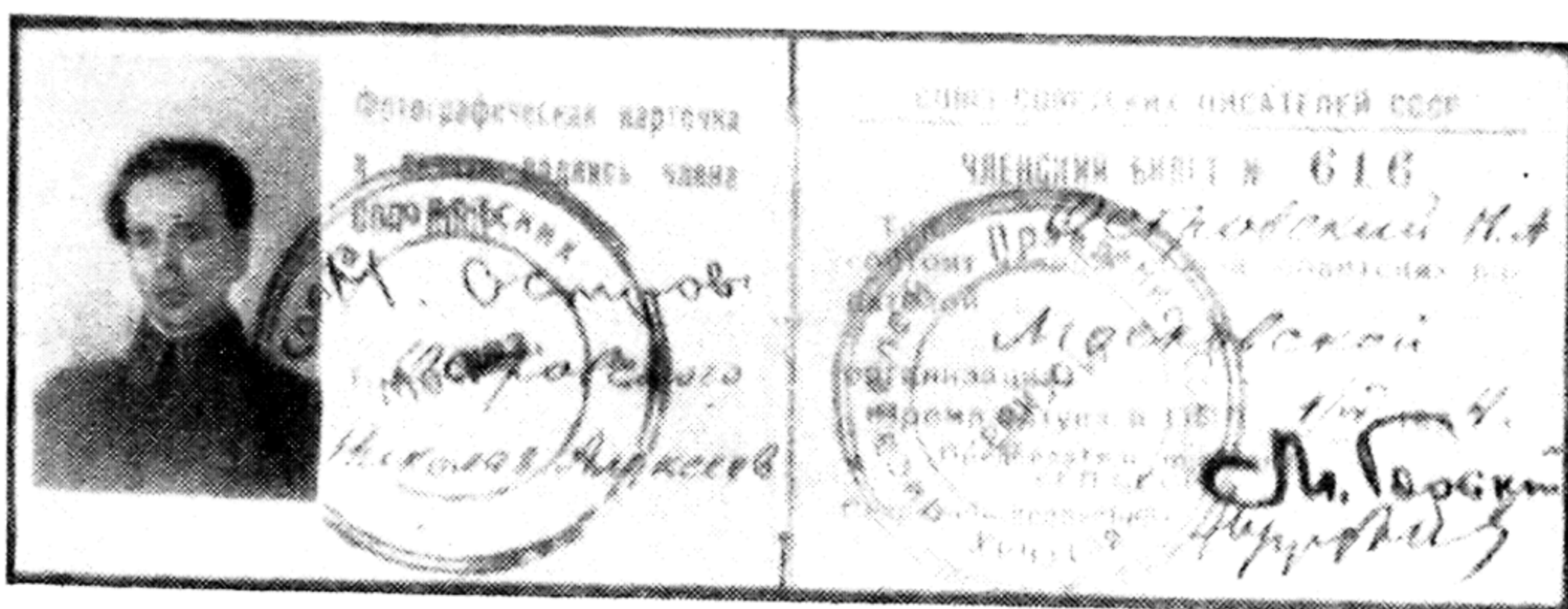
Ostrovsky declared that he “would very much like to break all records of longevity”. In the ordinary, physical sense, he did not break these records. But he unquestionably did set a record of another type: for the activity that characterised his life. His condition was hopeless; death hung always threateningly near; but, despising death, he lived his life with an energy, a sweep, of which only people of rare worth are capable.

Another visitor in the summer of 1934 was the poet Iosif Utkin, who recited his verse for Ostrovsky, and talked of literary life in Moscow.

Moscow drew Ostrovsky strongly. When the summer ended, all his visitors would leave—Serafimovich, Zalka, Utkin. Letters could not compensate for the loss of personal contacts, of direct conversation.

“I must return to Moscow,” he insisted in a letter to Anna Karavayeva. “There is no question about that to me. Growth, study—they require Moscow.”

This desire to shift to Moscow became the more urgent as the idea of his new book took clearer shape in his mind, growing more and more upon him, arousing the determination to carry it out, come what might.



*Nikolai Ostrovsky's membership card
in the Soviet Writers' Union*

On June 1, 1934, Ostrovsky was made a member of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union. "They took me in on credit, of course, for the books I'm still to write," he wrote, in all sincerity.

This was just before the appearance of Part Two of *How the Steel Was Tempered* in book form—in Russian and Ukrainian simultaneously.

A second Russian edition of the novel, and translations into Polish, Tatar, Mordovian, and Chuvash, appeared in the same year.

On July 11, 1934, the Ukrainian Central Committee of the Young Communist League met in special plenary session in Kiev to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the League in the Ukraine. A holiday gift had been prepared for each of the five hundred delegates who attended the session—a beautiful one-volume edition of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Parts One and Two, with this dedication on the title page: "To the Leninist Young Communist League of the Ukraine, which made me what I am."

Reviews, comment, letters from readers continued to appear in newspapers and magazines. The last chapters of Part Two made their appearance in the May issue

of *Molodaya Gvardia*; and the June issue carried an article, entitled "Birth of a Hero", in which Ostrovsky was acknowledged as an outstanding writer for the youth, one whose work would be a factor of no small importance in the communist training of the younger generation. Later issues of the magazine carried letters from readers, earnest and heartfelt.

League members everywhere demanded that the book be reprinted in a mass edition. Many proposed that it be filmed.

Somewhat later, in a review published in the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the present writer predicted a great future for the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, and foretold that many young heroes of future battles against fascism, when asked whence they derived their courage, would reply, "Read *How the Steel Was Tempered* and you'll understand."

SOCHI, OREKHOVAYA ULITSA, 47

The fame of the book, naturally, was the fame of its author as well. Day after day, the postman's pouch would be stuffed with letters for Orekhovaya Ulitsa, 47; and Ostrovsky's mornings generally began with the reading of this correspondence. He wrote of it in his article, "An Ordinary Day":

"... letters. They come from every part of our boundless Soviet Union—from Vladivostok, Tashkent, Fergana, Tiflis, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, Leningrad, Moscow.

"Moscow, Moscow! Heart of the world! These letters—they are my country, writing to one of her sons: to me, the author of a book called *How the Steel Was Tempered*; a beginner in the art of writing. Thousands of letters, lovingly filed—my dearest treasure. Who is it that writes to me? Everyone! Young workers in the factories; sailors, Black Sea and Baltic; flyers; Young Pioneers—all eager to express their thoughts, the feelings my book has aroused."

The Ukrainian Central Committee of the League passed a decision calling for discussion of Ostrovsky's book at all League units and in all the schools. "I must say, I never expected anything like that," Ostrovsky wrote. Rejoicing that he had returned, at last, to the ranks of the acting army of the Soviet people—triumphant in the knowledge that writing had become his share in

the work to be done, that he was an active participant in the people's great advance, in the heroic struggle for communism—Ostrovsky was constantly in haste to live, that is, to work.

“A man must work, for life is work, not vegetation.”

The idea of a new book, to be called *Born of the Storm*, had taken shape in Ostrovsky's mind as early as 1933. Mention of this had got into the press; and now the letters pouring in day after day, in ever increasing number—youthful, ardent, heartfelt letters—called upon him for fulfilment of these plans. He must make haste with this, he knew, for the end might come any day—any moment.

Here is one of those letters—a summons to labour:

“Dear Comrade Ostrovsky! We are waiting impatiently for your new novel, *Born of the Storm*. Finish it quickly. It will be a wonderful book, we know. Remember: we are waiting.”

“We”—that meant his readers. Millions of readers!

All the latter half of 1934, after the appearance of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Ostrovsky was occupied with plans for *Born of the Storm*.

For his new book, he demanded of himself a new and higher level of performance. And that required study, study, study.

Again he turned to Tolstoi—*War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*—not simply rereading, but studying, exploring, analysing.

Gorky's articles on literature, too, taught and guided him. He made abstracts of these articles, requesting Dr. Pavlovsky to copy out for him passages to which he felt that he must often return.

On August 17, 1934, in Moscow, the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers opened. Ostrovsky atten-



Ostrovsky's wife, R. Ostrovskaya

tively followed the congress discussions. Everything that appeared in the newspapers was read aloud to him, and he later received a copy of the stenographic record of the congress proceedings, which he studied from cover to cover.

"I'm doing my utmost," he wrote, "to bring my second child into the world as handsome and clever as possible."

But the new work involved new difficulties, difficulties not to be overcome without recourse to Moscow.

The book was to deal with the period of struggle against the Polish Whiteguards; but in Sochi no material on this subject was available.

"And from the very first," he wrote on November 22, 1934, in a letter to Bronislawa Marchlewska, "I'm held up by an utter lack of historical material. I have no books, no pamphlets, no articles, military or political, dealing with our relations with Poland through 1918, 1919, 1920. What I can recall of material read long since, and of what I myself witnessed or was told by others, is far from sufficient to form the groundwork of a political novel. I must read through everything again, study it thoroughly, before I can generalise upon it."

He was anxious to go through the documents of the period and other related materials. He wanted to know what the other side had to say.

"I want particularly," he wrote in the same letter, "to show the beginnings, and then the gathering of forces, of our fraternal Polish Communist Party. No amount of books, of course, can take the place of what real, live people can tell me of the real, live people of those days. For in a work of fiction it is the people portrayed that matter most of all. And that, again, makes Moscow essential to me."

Ostrovsky hoped to leave Sochi before winter—the more so that the weather had changed sharply for the worse, and the autumn rains seemed endless. All his Moscow friends, too, had left, and he was lonely. But

rooms in Moscow were not easy to get, and for that year the move to the capital had to be given up.

By early January 1935, the first two chapters of the new book had been roughly drafted. Their first readers and critics were the members of a literary group from the Profintern workers' club, who assembled in Ostrovsky's rooms to read and discuss the manuscript.

An attack of the 'flu, and then pleurisy, halted the progress of the book. The doctors absolutely forbade Ostrovsky to write, and even to read. "All of life calls on me to work, to be active—and I can't respond," he wrote to I. P. Fedenev. For a month and a half he did not work at all, obeying the doctors implicitly in the hope of getting back to work again as soon as possible. And when he did get to work he quickly made up for lost time—dictating new pages, editing what had already been set down, and studying the material his friends had been able to send him from Moscow.

Early in May he had five chapters ready, and sent them off to the *Molodaya Gvardia* magazine.

Before publication in the magazine these chapters appeared serially in the newspaper *Sochinskaya Pravda* (*Sochi Truth*). Ostrovsky's new work aroused tremendous interest. Huge queues formed daily at the Sochi newspaper stands.

Though hard at work on his book, Ostrovsky did not isolate himself from public activities. The Party unit to which he belonged held meetings at his bedside; the Young Communist League *active* often met in his rooms; on May Day, the leading comrades of the town Party Committee and the command of the local border detachment came to visit him. Also, he carried on an active and extensive correspondence, and when people wrote him of their troubles felt himself in duty bound

to aid them. On one occasion he helped an old teacher who had been denied a pension; on another, demanded of the People's Commissariat of Health of the Uzbek Republic that it investigate a complaint filed by a physician and pigeon-holed somewhere.

He worked so intensively at this period that the town Party Committee was compelled to interfere, supporting the doctors in their demand for a let-up.

On May 16, 1935, Party member Nikolai Ostrovsky rendered account to the bureau of the Sochi Party Committee, summing up the story of his literary efforts and describing the work he was doing at the moment and his plans for the immediate future.

"Of course," he said in the course of this report, "the doctors have their idea that I shall soon be off on my 'last leave'. But they said the same five years ago, and yet Ostrovsky has come through those five years, and has every intention of holding out another three, at the very least. They don't take into account the quality of the material I'm made of...."

"Letters come to me, hundreds of them, from Young Communist League organisations all over our country—letters that call on me to keep up the fight. And they set my heart on fire, make me feel it a crime to live a single day in idleness.

"My working day is ten to twelve hours out of the twenty-four. I must make haste in life."

The bureau adopted a decision approving the work of the Communist writer Ostrovsky and, in view of his extreme fatigue, prescribing that he "go on vacation"—in other words, cease work on his novel and take a month's rest.

As a Party member, Ostrovsky was obliged to submit.

"Today is my last day of work. Vacation starts tomorrow," he wrote on May 31, 1935.

And he did cease work on his novel. But his "vacation" did not work out.

The Central Cinema Board of the Ukraine had in April asked Ostrovsky to prepare a screen version of *How the Steel Was Tempered* for production at the Odessa studio. And now Mikhail Zats, a young Ukrainian scenarist, arrived in Sochi to help Ostrovsky with the script.

And so, instead of resting, Ostrovsky—incapable of doing anything by halves—threw himself energetically into this new work.

Zats had undertaken the trip to Sochi with some misgivings. Would Ostrovsky be able to understand the problems facing them? After all, he had for so many years been unable to follow the development of the cinema.

The screening of a novel is far from a simple matter. There can be no avoiding of cuts, and considerable ones, and of creative alterations in the very tissue of the original work.

Would Ostrovsky agree to all this?

Would he understand the specific demands of this new form of art?

But all doubts proved groundless. After a few general talks about the cinema, Ostrovsky himself said to his co-author:

"We shall have to throw out a great deal of what's in the book, to leave room for the fundamental things, and give more vivid screen life to the central figures: Korchagin, Zhukhrai, Artem, the mother, Rita."

Scene by scene, they selected the material that was to go into the script. Ostrovsky did not keep strictly to the book. Discarding some elements of the plot, he ex-



*The Vuillaume quartet visits Ostrovsky at his Sochi home
(1935)*

panded and developed others. Some of the episodes described in the book were replaced by others, entirely new.

Work on the script continued through the summer and autumn of 1935.

The resulting text was in many ways an independent, original piece of work.

Devoting so much time and energy to the script, however, Ostrovsky at the same time continued his accumulation of material for the further chapters of *Born of the Storm*; nor did the “endless rush of people” coming to him ever cease—nor the constant struggle to put down the “mutiny” of his sick body.

Day after day, he lay listening to documentary materials on the Civil War, historical memoirs, and translations of Polish novels, sent to him from Moscow.

Ever new people came to visit him; and for each he had a cordial, friendly greeting, with each he talked of

what lay close to his heart. Among his visitors were many writers: Alexander Korneichuk, Anna Karavayeva, Natan Ribak, Mikhail Svetlov, Nikolai Ognev, Mikhail Golodny, Valeria Gerasimova.

Each day that passed was full of happiness. July brought a second Ukrainian edition of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, in a printing of thirty thousand. The demand for the book grew steadily. The Molodaya Gvardia Publishing House put out a new Russian edition of a hundred thousand copies. A mass printing in paper covers came out, also in Moscow. Then Rostov and Krasnodar put the book out for local readers. The *International Literature* magazine published it in French, English, and German.

All would be well, if only his health held out! But July and August brought a new attack of illness.

"My treacherous health failed me once more," he wrote. "I suddenly found myself on the danger line. For a whole month, the doctors have been trying to stop this regression, pouring into me no end of all sorts of medicinal fluids. But so far they've not succeeded. I can only sigh at the thought that, not so long ago, I could work as much as 15 hours a day. Now, I can hardly manage three hours.... Thousands of letters*, coming to me from all parts of the Union, call me on to battle—and I lie here, trying to put down the mutiny inside me."

Physicians assembled in consultation. Again they advised Ostrovsky to be more careful of his health and, for a time, to give up his literary work. Ostrovsky protested, declaring, as one of the physicians recalls:

"I know I won't last very long. There's a fire inside me, eating me away, and it takes all my power of will

* In 1934, Ostrovsky received 1,700 letters from readers; in the first ten months of 1935—5,120.

to keep it under control. For the time being, I'm managing to do that. But I must make the best of this respite Nature has given me, and write all that I can write for our people before it ends. My time is short. One more attack of the 'flu and the smouldering flame will blaze up and devour me. I must make haste."

To Anna Karavayeva he wrote:

"For all the danger, I won't die, of course, this time either—if only for the reason that I haven't yet fulfilled the task the Party has entrusted to me."

And here is the "task" he had in mind: he must finish the film script of *How the Steel Was Tempered*; write the novel *Born of the Storm*, all three parts ("and not simply to get the book written, but to set it ablaze with the fire of my own heart"); write ("by all means") a book about Pavka Korchagin's happiness; a book for children, *Pavka's Childhood* ("I must get written"); a book about Budyonny (this is mentioned in the reminiscences of M. Zats), and a collection of humorous stories (of which he spoke to the present writer).

All this constituted his "minimum" in life—his five-year plan.

"You'll smile, I suppose," he wrote to Anna Karavayeva. "But it can't be any other way. The doctors smile, too—puzzled and embarrassed. But—duty above all else. And therefore I stand for five years as a minimum."

He asked Anna Karavayeva to call on the critics, in his name, "to open Bolshevik fire" on the first five chapters of *Born of the Storm*. "Tell them not to fear hard words," he wrote. "I can stand anything, and I must be told all there is to tell. I must know the truth."

On October 1, 1935, Ostrovsky was visited by Lenin's brother and sister, Maria Ilyinichna and Dmitry Ilyich Ulyanov. This visit left a deep and very happy impres-



*Nikolai Ostrovsky, wearing the Order of Lenin,
and his brother Dmitry*

sion in Ostrovsky's heart. In parting, Maria Ilyinichna said:

"Carry on, and let nothing worry you. The Party remembers you always, has your welfare always in mind."

And late that evening the telephone rang. Someone asked to speak to Ostrovsky personally. His sister held the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, this is Ostrovsky. Who is calling? The *Sochinskaya Pravda* offices, did you say?"

A pause, during which a voice rumbled loudly in the receiver.

Dr. Pavlovsky, who happened to witness this scene, writes that Ostrovsky's face was suddenly transfigured with inexpressible amazement and happiness.

"Mother," he said, his voice trembling with emotion, "Mother, it's the newspaper office. They say they've just heard a radio broadcast from Moscow that the writer Ostrovsky has been awarded the Order of Lenin."

Next morning the newspapers carried on their front pages the decision of the Central Executive Committee of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics "to decorate the writer Nikolai Alexeyevich Ostrovsky, former active member of the Young Communist League, heroic participant in the Civil War, physically disabled in the struggle for Soviet power, yet with his pen devotedly carrying on the fight for the cause of socialism, author of the gifted work *How the Steel Was Tempered*, with the Order of Lenin".

Telegrams and letters of congratulation began to arrive. There were messages from the Central Committee of the Leninist Young Communist League, from the Ukrainian Central Committee of the League, from

League units, from workers' organisations and other public bodies, from writers, from readers.

"Greetings and congratulations on your decoration with the Order of Lenin," wrote M. I. Kalinin. "With all my heart I hope that this reward will be to you the source of a new tide of energy in your so beneficial work for the peoples of our Union."

"We congratulate you on your decoration," wrote Maria Ilyinichna and Dmitry Ilyich Ulyanov and Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya.

The days that followed merged into one unbroken holiday.

"In the last few days," Ostrovsky said, "my rooms, this modest little house, have been transformed into a regular staff headquarters. The telephone is constantly ringing, and automobiles driving up; old comrades greet me from every corner of our vast land, in wonderful, fervent letters."

The Academy of Arts sent one of its graduates, the young artist Yar-Kravchenko, to Sochi—the first and only artist to draw the living Ostrovsky.

On the evening of October 12, Kiev, Sochi, and Shepetovka organised a joint radio broadcast devoted to Ostrovsky. From Kiev, the programme began with greetings to the writer by a representative of the Ukrainian Central Committee of the League, after which famed Ukrainians, readers of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, spoke of the impression the book had made upon them. Then Shepetovka greeted its "own son Nikolai". In Sochi the microphone was set up at Ostrovsky's bedside. In his room, that evening, sat the poets Alexander Bezimensky, Vera Inber, and Mikhail Golodny, and also a group of local comrades. Speaking in reply to the greetings from Kiev and Shepetovka, Ostrovsky said:

"In my book *How the Steel Was Tempered* I wrote:

" 'It was very late when Pavel returned home that night. He had made a speech at the meeting, little suspecting that it was the last he was ever to make at a large public gathering.'

"I must say that I was wrong. It was wrong to say that Korchagin had made his last public speech. In our country a fighter can never say that he is making his last speech—not while his heart still beats in his breast.

"I am working today, working happily as never before in my life. One might think—this fighter has been struck down; deprived of the joy of struggle in the ranks of his comrades; bound to his bed by fearful illness. But that is not so. I'm working, and I greet life with a smile. Our life is wonderful beyond compare!"

He went on to tell his listeners about the new work he had begun—the novel *Born of the Storm*—and to acquaint them with a chapter from this novel.

This was Ostrovsky's first speech into the microphone. It produced a tremendous impression upon all listeners, and particularly upon the youth. How many wonderful, heartfelt letters he received in response!

That same evening Radio News recorded a message of greeting from Ostrovsky to the demonstration that would be marching through Moscow's Red Square on November 7, the eighteenth anniversary of the October Revolution.

On October 23, Ostrovsky again spoke over the radio, addressing a meeting of active Sochi Party members.

The League organisations of Kiev, Kharkov, Shepetovka, the Donbas, Rostov, Taganrog, Armavir sent representatives to Sochi with fervent messages of greeting to the young people's best-loved writer. With their greetings they sent gifts: beautifully-made models of

a rifle and a cannon, on a marble base; a model of a coal cart, filled with high-grade anthracite coal, and a miners' lamp; an electric fan; the book *Fifteen Years of the Ukrainian Young Communist League*; autographed copies of books by contemporary Ukrainian writers; gramophone records, etc.

"Thanks, friends, thanks," Ostrovsky responded, touched and embarrassed.

He asked each of the visitors where he came from, what he did, how he got on with his work. He joked with them, and laughed, and sang.

A group of veterans of the historic rising of 1905 on the armoured cruiser *Potemkin*, who were resting at one of the Sochi sanatoriums, came to see Ostrovsky—their youthful comrade in the struggle. This visit touched Ostrovsky particularly.

"All honour to you, veteran fighters," he said to them in parting.

On November 24, the Sochi Party Committee, the town Soviet, the trade-union council, and the Young Communist League Committee met in joint plenary session at the Riviera theatre. Through the loudspeaker came Ostrovsky's fervent voice. The Order of Lenin had just been brought him, and in his speech of response he said:

"We strove always to model our lives upon the lives of those amazing people, the Old Bolsheviks, who led us through the years of heroic battle to the joy of living in the Land of Socialism. We, the youth, strove always to resemble them. We venerated them. We were devoted heart and soul to our commanders, our leaders. And when illness bound me to my bed, I gave all that I had in me to show my teachers, the Old Bolsheviks, that the younger generation of the working class will never

surrender, whatever the circumstances. I fought my illness. It tried to break me, to tear me from the ranks, but I declared, 'No surrender!' I was confident of victory. I kept on, because I felt our Party's tender care. And today I face life joyfully, for it has returned me to the ranks."

The hall responded to Ostrovsky's speech with a veritable storm of applause.

A new burst of applause greeted the appearance in the speakers' stand of the writer's mother, Olga Osipovna Ostrovskaya.

"Dear friends," Olga Osipovna exclaimed, "it is only a few words I want to say to you. Every mother, every father, will understand my emotion. I am so happy that he is alive, bringing happiness to people and to me, too."

Yes he was alive, and called upon others to be alive. "Hail, life!" he cried. "Hail, struggle!"

He was ready to carry on his struggle.

And therefore—work, work, work!

Ostrovsky was tired to the limit of endurance. "No time for meals, almost. No time to be alone with one's own self," he wrote in a letter dated October 28. In another letter, in early December, he wrote, "I'm occupied now with rallying, bit by tiny bit, the strength I spent so liberally in those days of celebration." But in this same letter, though admitting that he is tremendously tired, and that "it's hard for me, just now, to put my thoughts and feelings into any semblance of order," he adds, "Happiness doesn't kill."

The heroes of *Born of the Storm* were waiting for him. He had solemnly pledged himself to complete this book; yet the writing of it, broken off in the spring, had not yet been resumed. Of the material he needed, all that was available in Sochi or at the Moscow Re-

gional Library (which sent him books by mail) had already been studied. To continue his work, he must have access to actual documents of the Civil War period.

"The Red Army General Staff and the *History of the Civil War* editorial board," he wrote to Anna Karavayeva, "have promised me every assistance in getting material on the war with the Polish Whites. . . . That being so, I dare hope that my novel will be firmly based on documentary facts."

He was determined to go to Moscow—to work the winter there, and then, when summer came, return to Sochi, where the Ukrainian Government was building him a new home, and there finish the first part of his new novel.

The doctors objected to the trip to Moscow, but Ostrovsky insisted.

"By dint of determined struggle," he wrote on December 2, "I've finally won the doctors' 'permit' to make the trip. At first they wouldn't hear of it. The fight was hard, but victory has come. 'You'll die on the way,' they keep telling me, even now. . . .

"The only danger now is the trip. If I don't hold out, I'll be disgraced! No one will forgive me that. And therefore I must be sure to arrive safely."

He set about energetic preparations for the move to the capital.

On December 6, he spoke by radio to a conference of young writers of the Azov and Black Sea Territory.

And on December 9, accompanied by his sister, Yekaterina Alexeyevna Ostrovskaya, Dr. M. K. Pavlovsky, and his friend L. N. Bersenev, he set out for Moscow.

The railway provided a special car, and everything possible was done to keep Ostrovsky comfortable

during the trip. His sister was constantly at his side. As at home, she washed and shaved him, kept his bedding in order, prepared his food, and fed him with infinite patience. Ostrovsky's mouth opened only slightly, and all his food had to be cut into tiny slices. He ate little at a time, but several times in the course of the day. He asked frequently for water.

Dr. Pavlovsky was on the alert throughout the trip, ready for any emergency.

The railway junctions had been informed that Nikolai Ostrovsky would be passing with the Sochi-Moscow express, and station officials everywhere came to the car to inquire what they could do to help.

At Rostov, and then at Kharkov, delegations of workers and writers came to the station to greet Ostrovsky. The "endless rush of people" anxious to see him continued even during his journey.

On December 11, at Serpukhov, his Moscow friends boarded the train.

Ostrovsky seemed very cheerful. He laughed and joked, and asked what was new in the capital.

Yet, as he later confessed, he was in these moments undergoing an attack of renal colic that caused him excruciating pain. His sister and Dr. Pavlovsky noticed that he had turned suddenly pale, and that a cold sweat had come out on his forehead. But to their anxious inquiries he answered only that he was a little tired.

Gently swaying, with a slight shiver at rail joints, the train sped on. Outside the windows lay snow-covered fields. Then the lights of Moscow came into sight—and Ostrovsky seemed to sense their glitter.

"Moscow, Moscow, heart of our country," he said, with deep feeling.

It was here that he had come into being as a writer; here, that his first book had been published.

"I feel wonderful," he said. "And how could I feel otherwise? Tell the comrades so."

But the comrades Ostrovsky had in mind—League leaders, newspapermen, representatives of the Moscow Soviet, Young Pioneers—were already crowding into the car. A little girl thrust a bunch of chrysanthemums into his hands.

"You greet me like a conqueror," Ostrovsky said. "I am very happy to be in my beloved Moscow. I am deeply touched by the consideration and care I have received all along the way, and warmly grateful for this reception in Moscow. . . . I am very grateful to you all."

IN MOSCOW

Ostrovsky arrived in Moscow on December 11, 1935.

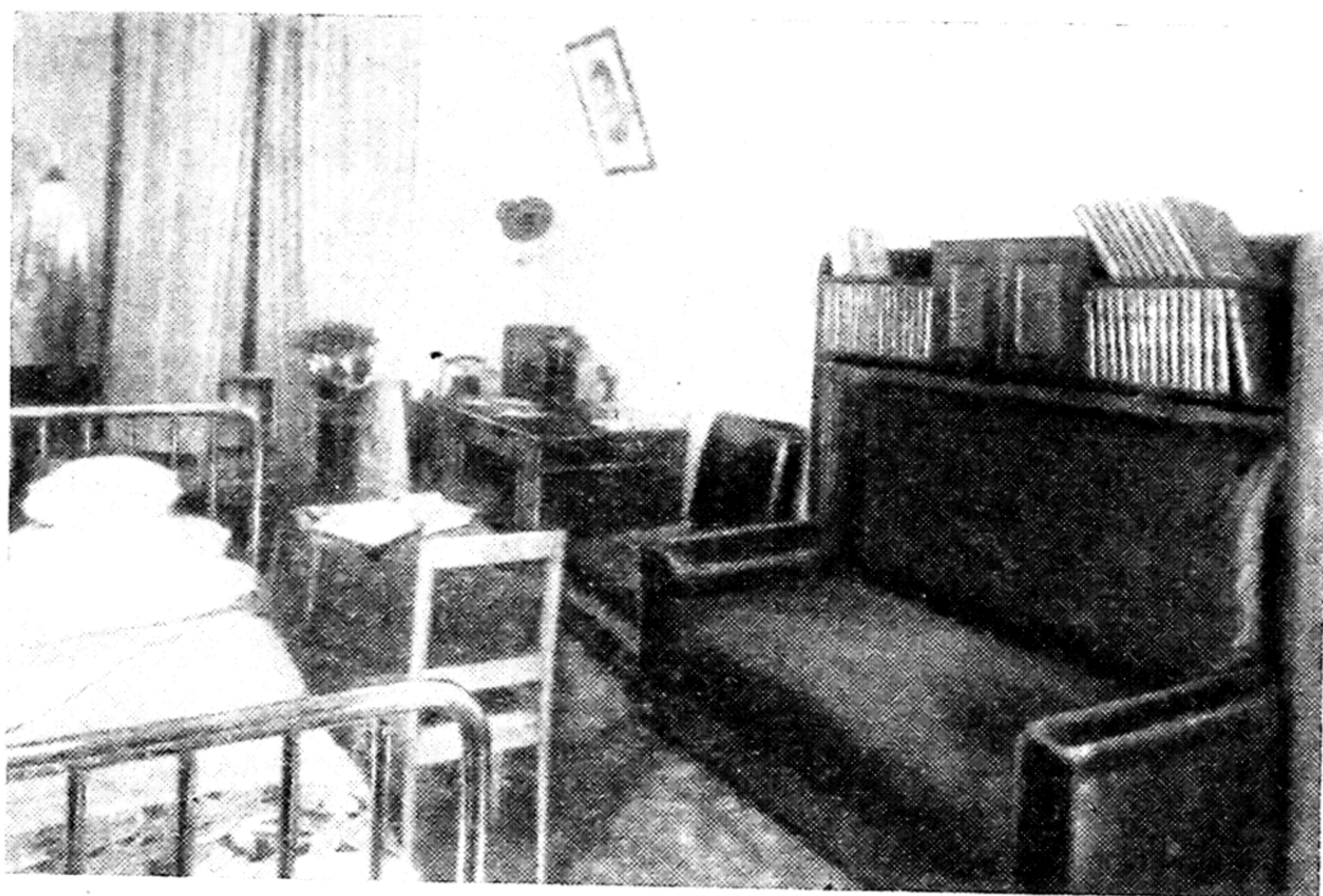
He was carried from the train to a specially heated ambulance (the weather was very cold), and soon reached his new rooms at 40, Gorky Street.

He wanted to know what the rooms were like. He asked about every detail: the size of each of the rooms; the ventilation; the furnishings; the capacity of the bookcases; whether there were flowers.

A few days were devoted to rest and settling down, and then Ostrovsky threw himself into his work. First of all came what he called "organisational problems"—establishment of contact with the Writers' Union, libraries, archives, publishing houses. And then, with his never-failing ardour—*Born of the Storm*.

Ostrovsky's secretary and stenographer, Antonina Zibina, read him wartime literature, and issue after issue of *Pravda* for 1918, 1919, and 1920, jotting down notes in a special memorandum book at his indication, or copying out whole passages from articles of interest. When he began to dictate, she took down his words in shorthand and afterwards typed them out.

Growing tired, Ostrovsky would call a stop, "to catch his breath", as he put it. The tinkle of a bell would invite everyone who happened to be at home to gather in his room for a little music. And not only music.



Ostrovsky's room in the flat on Gorky Street, Moscow

... There he lies before you—a gaunt figure, under a blanket drawn up to the waist. His thin, sensitive, mobile face—the face of one much given to thought, to concentrated mental effort—is literally alight with inspiration. It reflects as in a mirror the movement of his thoughts. And that does away at once with any impression of helplessness. His forehead is high. Over the right eyebrow there is a little hollow, distinctly visible—the mark of a cruel wound. He wears a khaki Army tunic. The Order of Lenin gleams on his chest. His deep-sunk eyes are open, and seem to you alive—seeing, feeling.

The room is sunk in semi-darkness. The huge window, opening on Gorky Street, is hung with heavy drapery that keeps out the light and deadens the sounds of the street. Only one small wall lamp burns, and that is veiled with red cloth. (Light hurt his eyes, and inflamed

them.) The room is unusually warm—almost like a hothouse.

On the wall to the left hangs a portrait of Lenin. There is a desk in the room, in the corner opposite the bed; a leather couch, a piano, a bookcase. A bust of Henri Barbusse.

But you have no more time for observation. Your host, warned of your coming, is speaking to you. His voice is youthful, energetic, friendly. He asks you to sit down beside him, and offers you his hand. His hands alone, of all his body, retain some remnant of mobility. He presses your hand in greeting, and keeps it in his all through your talk with him.

And you divine, by his firm clasp, by the nervous pressure of his fingers as you talk, that this contact illumines you, as it were, for his mental vision, helps him to form an idea of what you may be like.

"When I hold your hand," he says, as though to confirm your surmise, "I seem to get a better understanding of what you say. I can imagine you more vividly, and that helps me greatly. If I cannot physically feel the nearness of the person I am talking with, if he stands a little away from me, his voice seems to come to me from somewhere far off, from out of the dark gulf that surrounds me, and then I cannot understand him as well as I should. His words reach me through a sort of fog."

You, too, through this unusual handclasp, begin to sense his tremendous inner tension, to be drawn body and soul into the "high-voltage circuit" of his thoughts and feelings.

And as you sit there, talking with him, you begin to forget that this man has for long years been victim to a fearful illness.

"It's not illness," he says to you, "that's a man's worst enemy. Blindness is an appalling thing; but even blindness can be conquered. There's another thing that's far more dangerous: laziness. Plain human laziness. Yes, when a man no longer feels the urge, the need to work; when his heart is empty; when, lying down to sleep at night, he can find no answer to the simple question, 'What have I accomplished in the day just ended?'—that's the fearful thing. That's the dangerous thing. That's when his friends should gather in consultation, to seek ways of saving him, for he is near disaster. Whereas, once a man retains his urge to work, and keeps on working, come what may, regardless of all obstacles and difficulties—that man is a normal working man, and all is well with him."

"It's not pleasant," he says to you, "when one tooth aches. And when a thousand teeth ache, it's a sin and a shame. But I sweep that thousand out with a broom of iron. In my work, I am above all illness. I disdain it, mock at it. In Gorky's works I have read that a man should disdain suffering; that suffering is unworthy of a man, and he must learn to set himself above it. And to do that, he must have an aim, and he must feel the helping hand of his collective, his people, his Party...."

"A man becomes really a man, let me tell you, when he has some great ideal to live for. Then he stops living by parts—belly, liver, sex—and begins to live as one whole. That, if you get down to it, is what makes a man a man. That is what constitutes man's might. And there is one great ideal that can transform not only individuals, but whole nations into heroes: communism, the struggle for the people's happiness."

And you begin to feel—not pity for him, no!—but a vast pride in him. And shame overwhelms you at the

thought of your own comparative sluggishness, at the thought of things that you have left undone—today, perhaps, and yesterday, and the day before. More fully and more clearly than ever before, you begin to realise the meaning and significance of life, begin to understand how life can be lived worthily, to the full measure of one's abilities.

On January 1, 1936, the newspaper *Izvestia* published a brief article by Ostrovsky in which the writer summed up what he had accomplished in the year just ended and described his plans for the immediate future. "My Happiest Year", the article was called.

"Were anyone to ask," Ostrovsky wrote, "what year of my life had brought me the greatest happiness, I could answer only,

" '1935.'

"There can be no measure to a fighter's happiness, if his will, his perseverance, have gained his country's praise; if on his breast, where the heart beats, he wears the Order of Lenin. . . .

"I meet the new year of 1936 imbued with hopes, with creative aspirations, with a vast desire to work. Moved by this desire, I have come to Moscow, to be closer to our national archives—indispensable to me in the writing of my new novel, *Born of the Storm*. . . .

"I have not worked on my new novel in the last few months. Circumstances compelled me to put off this work. Now I return to my heroes, return to the winter of 1919 in the snow-covered Ukraine. Andri Ptakha rises before me, vivid as life itself—the young stoker, with his curly flaxen hair. His grey eyes, so courageous, are turned on me in stern reproach.

" 'You've let us down, brother. Can't you hear the hoofbeats thundering? It's time you sent us into battle!'

"And beside him—pretty, dark-eyed Olesya Kovallo. I love Olesya dearly. She will grow into a fine Young Communist, I know, and a helper to her father—old mechanic Kovallo, member of the Bolshevik underground.

"I press your hands, young friends, and promise not to part with you again."

Before returning to his young heroes, Ostrovsky plunged into study of the wealth of material available in Moscow.

"Moscow has . . . given me all I was longing for," he wrote on January 22. "I'm enjoying my work tremendously, and if life didn't keep bringing up dozens of obstacles, great and small, if life were kinder to me and let my heart alone, I think my literary work would make great strides."

He devoured—as he expressed it—"poods of books", making extracts of the material read. Some thirty volumes, those most essential—his handbooks, he called them—were kept always within reach.

He knew many of these books so well that, when some fact or quotation from them was needed, he could tell his secretary exactly where to find it.

This thoroughgoing preparatory work gave Ostrovsky a clear understanding of the general political situation in the period in which his novel was laid, and of the significance of each historical fact that he came up with. And all this helped him to knit his plot together, helped him in the portrayal of individual characters.

He would not begin to dictate, as a rule, until what he wished to say had taken final shape in his mind.

"And now I'm absorbed in Przygodski and his tragedy. He knows no happiness in his family life, this grim and yet so tender-hearted fellow, this splendid fighter. Often,

in battle and in time of strenuous marches, his thoughts turn to his loving friend, to buxom Franciszka. He recalls her caresses, her soft yielding . . . and his heart contracts with pain. No other woman can attract him. As yet, I've found no true conclusion to the situation for Przygodski and for Franciszka. It's a difficult problem for the artist to deal with. I think, I feel, that Przygodski can love no other woman; and yet, I find it very hard to believe that his love for Franciszka may blaze up again with the old ardour, and bring healing warmth into his life. But we shall see. It will all depend on whether he doesn't fall in battle. . . . And it may seem queer, but I feel it all so keenly—as though Przygodski were a friend of mine, and a very dear one. Whereas, after all, he's only a character in a book I'm writing."

This passage from one of Ostrovsky's letters gives us a glimpse into that "holy of holies"—the writer's creative laboratory, the workings of his mind. Life, the real truth of life, was his criterion for every situation that arose in his book. Insistently, painfully, he searched always for the one solution that would be true.

And when the solution was found, when he could see in his mind's eye all the complications, all the contradictions, that taken together made up the truth, he would begin eagerly to dictate.

His dictation was rapid and distinct.

While he was dictating, no one was permitted to enter his room. No questions were allowed, no remarks, no requests that he repeat a word or sentence. Such interruptions broke the thread of his thoughts, and it was difficult for him to reknit it. Even such tiny sounds as the rustle of a turned page or the rubbing of an

eraser, caught his oversensitive hearing and distracted his thoughts, hindering his work.

In Moscow Ostrovsky worked even more intensively than in Sochi.

"My life here is very quiet, secluded," he wrote. "I see no one but the people connected with my work. And my energy is spent quite rationally."

And, in another letter:

"I'm entirely absorbed in my work. Toiling away for all I'm worth. My literary affairs are making progress."

In this period Ostrovsky considerably advanced his work on the new novel. But, for all his "secluded" manner of life, not all his time, of course, was devoted to writing.

He would spend hours on end in talk with the comrade who was buying books for his library. This comrade would bring huge lists of titles, and Ostrovsky would go through them carefully, indicating which of the books listed he would like to acquire.

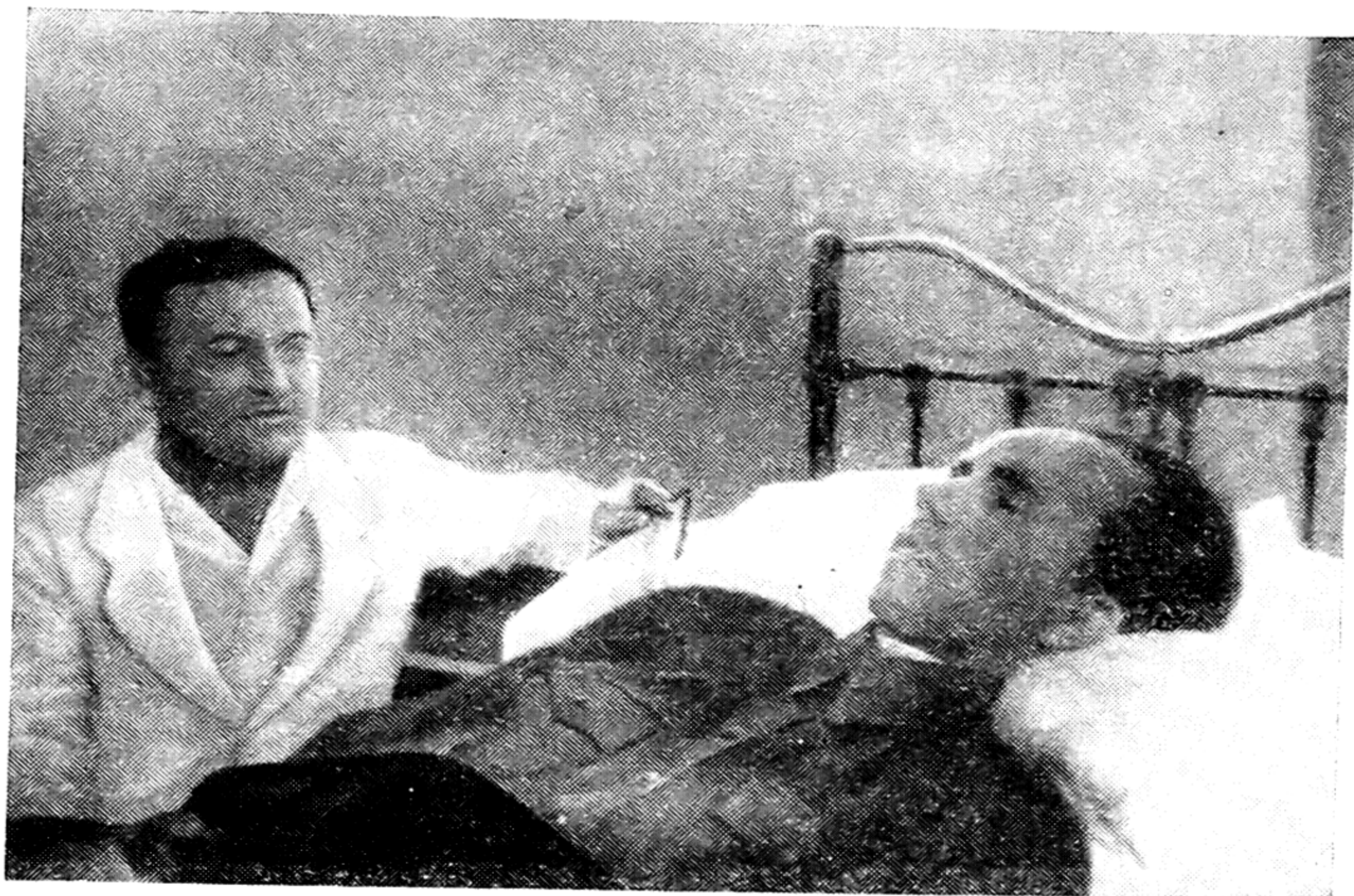
These included the classics, Russian and West-European.

In Ostrovsky's rooms one was liable to meet the most varied people: the writer Mikhail Sholokhov, or noted women from Ukrainian collective farms; actors from the Maly Theatre, or Leningrad Young Communist Leaguers; newspapermen, or students of music.

Friendly visits, business visits, telephone conversations, newspaper reading, listening in on radio broadcasts—his daily life went on as always. He answered letters promptly, and was always glad of the opportunity to do something for somebody.

"No," he wrote, "life can't rob me."

For ten years Ostrovsky's name had not been included even in Army reserve lists. In Moscow, now, the Army



The author, Semyon Tregub, at Ostrovsky's bedside

Political Administration once more "called him to the colours", entering him on a special personal register as an Army correspondent. This, to him, was a great triumph.

Here is a passage from one of the letters he received in this connection:

"You are probably the only existing brigade commissar who cannot say how many men his brigade numbers. But, as you probably realise, the brigade is a huge one. It includes all of the Young Communist League, all of the youth of our vast land—and not only of our land! For there has never been a character in any book who has aroused such warmth in young hearts, such fervent love and tenderness, as their own Pavel Korchagin, so close, so dear. There has never been a writer whom the youth has loved so fervently, so sincerely, as their own Nikolai Ostrovsky."

He knew well that life would bring him "many another bitter pill". But he knew, too, that "physical losses are recompensed a hundred times over by the spiritual wealth that comes of my creative work".

In early January, in connection with the approaching Tenth Congress of the Young Communist League, he wrote an article which he called, "My Report to the Tenth League Congress". On January 29, he wrote a letter of congratulations to Romain Rolland, who was celebrating his seventieth birthday. On February 1, he sent a message of greeting, "To the Young Communist League Members of My Native Town", to the Shepetovka Area Conference of the League.

On April 6 he delivered a fiery radio speech to the Ninth Ukrainian Congress of the League.

Then, on April 11, in Moscow, began the Tenth All-Union Congress of the League. Ostrovsky had been elected a delegate to the congress, representing the Vinnitsa Region.

How the Steel Was Tempered was mentioned in the report to the congress, as an achievement in which the whole League should take pride; and this evoked a great burst of applause from the delegates.

The congress lasted ten days. Ostrovsky's rooms were connected by direct wire with the Kremlin hall in which the congress was being held, and he thus participated in all its deliberations.

"I'm the most regular of all the delegates," he remarked, smiling.

He heard out every speech with great attention. When the delegates began to sing, he, too, would join in the chorus. In the intermissions between the morning and afternoon sessions he worked on his own speech, which he was to have delivered on April 17.

What did he plan to say? That we know from his preliminary notes.

He planned to speak of the fighting mission of our literature.

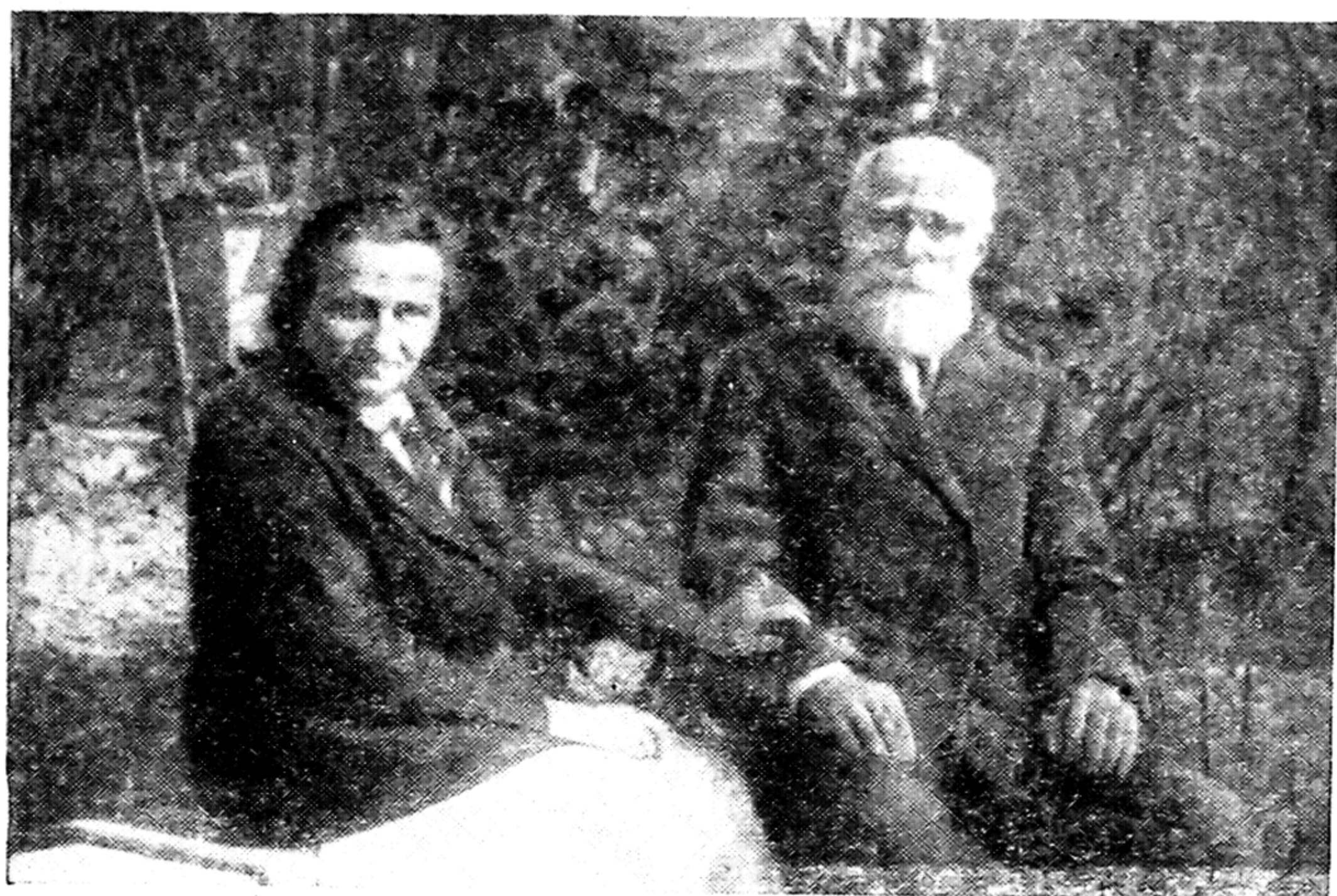
He planned to speak of the increased spiritual needs of the youth, and the necessity of satisfying those needs. "Eyes on the Heights"—such is one of the demanding subheads of his notes. And, in explanation: "Let there be fewer books, if need be; but the books must be good. There is no room on our bookshelves for the mediocre. No one has the right to steal time, to steal honest workers' hours of leisure. . . . Our reader has become a severe, a merciless critic. Let none dare try to feed him chaff."

He planned to say to the youth: "Keep your feet firmly on your native earth. Live the life of the collective, and remember: it was the collective that trained you."

He planned to speak of the new qualities of Soviet men and women, qualities that it is the writer's duty to perceive and to portray for his readers, for all the world. "New Feelings"—such is the final subhead in his notes. And these new feelings are enumerated: "Friendship, honesty, collectivism, humanity—such are our companions. The training of courage and valour; selfless devotion to the Revolution, and hatred for the enemy—such are our laws."

It was these thoughts that occupied Ostrovsky during the congress, these thoughts that he was preparing to express. But overfatigue had so affected his health that he was not able to deliver his speech.

"Averbakh has been to see my eyes," he wrote at about this period. "He urgently advises me to have my right eye out. So that, as you see, not all my ordeals are



Ostrovsky's parents

over.... That seems to be my profession, really: losing bit after bit of my physical being."

His illness was steadily progressing.

On April 28, a telegram arrived from Sochi. Ostrovsky's father had died. "That reminded me," Ostrovsky said, "that I, too, am not eternal—that I must make still more haste in life."

May Day approached. On the last night of April Ostrovsky got no sleep. Columns of tanks and big guns rumbled down Gorky Street all night, and their metallic din came in at the windows, filling the rooms, drowning out every other sound. When the movement paused for a moment, songs and shouts would resound all up and down the street.

Ostrovsky lay listening, excited and happy. It was as if he himself were out there, in the street, among

the columns of fighters preparing for the morning parade.

With dawn came music, pouring from loudspeakers set up in the streets. And then—the demonstration, with its songs and shouts and laughter.

Ostrovsky's people began to worry. In his condition, such nervous strain was unquestionably bad for him.

Someone went so far as to suggest a change of quarters.

"Shame, shame!" Ostrovsky cried, when this came to his ears. "Why, I'd give up sleep for any number of nights, just to hear all this again!"

The rumble of tanks and guns, the clamour of human exultation, that came in at his windows from the festive streets of the city brought him new, more vivid realisation of the growing might of his great Socialist Motherland and the militant spirit of the Soviet people.

Two weeks later Ostrovsky left for Sochi, there to spend the summer and to complete the first book of *Born of the Storm*, for which he now had all the material that he needed.

On Pionersky Pereulok (now N. Ostrovsky Pereulok), in the upper part of Sochi, a new home awaited him, the gift of the Ukraine.

THE SUMMER OF 1936

"I spend my days out on an open balcony," Ostrovsky wrote in one of his first letters from Sochi. "A fresh breeze blows from the sea, warm and caressing. I gulp the sea air—can't get my fill of it! It's fine here, in my new home."

Once settled in this new home, Ostrovsky was eager to complete the first book of his novel as quickly as possible. He had the material at his finger-tips, and it literally begged to be set down on paper. There were four chapters still to be written.

Soon after his return to Sochi, however, Ostrovsky fell very ill, a severe attack of his kidney trouble being complicated with jaundice and a gastric disorder. The doctors declared his condition critical. His life was in danger.

Only on June 14, was Ostrovsky able to write, to the author of these lines:

"Don't wonder at my long silence. I had my archives to put in order, and all my literary materials, my library, etc. The weather here has been abominable all this time, jumping from one extreme to another, with the humidity at 85 to 90 per cent. My health tried to take a down turn, but I noticed that in time and restored equilibrium. Tomorrow I return to my manuscript and start working."

What is here so minimised—"tried to take a down turn", and "restored equilibrium"—is more fully explained in later letters.

"My health keeps betraying me," he wrote to his wife on July 31. "Catastrophe may come any day. And so I make haste, treasuring every minute. The trouble, it turns out, was a breakdown of the gall bladder. This time death passed me by."

And on August 19 he wrote:

"I all but died of a new foe that turned up in my body.... The doctors thought there was no hope.... Even I, for all I've been through in life, felt that the end of my tether was nearing. It was a battle for very life.... But, as you see, life conquered this time too, and I am slowly convalescing. The wound has healed. I am not only better—I have thrown myself into my work so eagerly that all else is forgotten."

On June 15, he set to work on his manuscript. But three days later came the shock of grievous tidings that shook our whole land, the whole world: the death of Gorky, on June 18, 1936.

In a telegram addressed to the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Ostrovsky wrote:

"I am shaken to the depths of my soul by this irretrievable loss. Gorky has left us. A fearful thought. Only yesterday he was alive, thinking, rejoicing with us at the tremendous victories of our Motherland, to which his creative genius was so wholly devoted. What a weight of responsibility now falls upon Soviet literature, with the loss of him who organised and inspired its work!

"Farewell, dear Gorky, beloved, unforgettable!"

There had been so much, both in life and in literature, to endear Gorky to Ostrovsky!

I remember with what emotion Ostrovsky handed me a copy of his *How the Steel Was Tempered*, to be given to Gorky. This was in early April 1936, just before the Tenth League Congress, when I was leaving for Tesseli to visit Gorky. Ostrovsky wrote on the fly-leaf, with his own hand, "With filial love". He asked me to put the book into Gorky's hands myself.

I remember, too, how he lay listening, all attention, when I described to him my meeting and conversation with Gorky, who had inquired about him with great interest and had sent his thanks for the book. Only one thing had worried Gorky: was the young writer not getting conceited? Would his fame not spoil him, not work his destruction? Gorky named another youthful writer, who as a result of his first literary success had developed a monstrous, disfiguring self-opinion. When I replied that Ostrovsky was not that sort, he repeated after me, as though in doubt, "Not that sort?"—then sat frowning thoughtfully a while, drumming on his desk with his fingers; and finally declared, with no doubt in his tone, "Yes, judging by everything, he's really not that sort."

Ostrovsky questioned me eagerly about every detail of this meeting of mine with Gorky. It was as though he himself were experiencing it.

He cherished the hope that, after reading *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Gorky might express an opinion of it.

And might there not, some day, be the possibility of meeting him?

But now—now Gorky would never say what he thought of the book. Now Ostrovsky would never meet him. Ostrovsky never learned that Gorky had said of him, in a conversation with Y. A. Peshkova, "His life

is a living illustration of the victory of the spirit over the flesh"—and had advised her to read *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

In his story *The Clock*, dating back to the beginnings of his literary life, Gorky wrote:

"Do not spare yourself—there is the proudest, the most beautiful wisdom on earth. Hail the man who has not the ability to spare himself! There are only two forms of life: putrefaction and combustion. The cowardly and greedy will choose the first; the courageous and generous, the second. All who love beauty will see clearly where majesty lies.... Hail the man who has not the ability to spare himself!"

Ostrovsky was one of the courageous and generous.

"My health—to tell the truth, it's no damned good at all," he wrote to his wife on August 2. "But I work 12 hours, in two shifts.... Truly, all our life is struggle. Truly, my one joy lies in creative work."

On August 6:

"I'm pressing hard all along the front.... The first volume will soon be done.... Two typists in the house, clattering away from morning to night. Two secretaries. And all this army has been thrown into attack."

August 9:

"The work is at its hottest just now. The last pages of the book are in the writing. And the whole book in the process of editing. A. P. [Alexandra Petrovna Lazareva—S.T.] and all the rest are working in two shifts. The house is full of typists. I keep hurrying them all, as usual, and I suppose they're waiting impatiently for the day when this crazy fellow quiets down."

And, finally, on August 21:

"Today I finished the first book of the novel *Born of the Storm*.

"A hundred and twenty-three typewritten pages between July 17 and August 17.... Unheard-of speed and strain.

"I'm infinitely tired—but the first book is ready!"

The manuscript was typed in several copies, bound, and sent to friends and publishers for comment and criticism.

"I'd like to send you the manuscript of *Born of the Storm*," he wrote to Mikhail Sholokhov, "but on one condition—that you read it through and tell me what you think of it. And tell me honestly. If you don't like it, let the brick-bats fly! 'Neither bitter nor sweet'—that sort of thing. 'Slush, that's all', as they put it in the twenties. Yes, Misha, I'm searching hard for an honest comrade, for someone willing to hit out frankly. Our own fraternity—the writers—have lost the habit of speaking from the heart. And friends—friends are afraid of hurting a person's feelings. And that's very bad. Praise only spoils a man. Even strong characters are liable to be led astray, if people praise them beyond measure.

"Real friends should tell the truth, however painful it may be. And they should write more about shortcomings than about what has been done well. What is well done, the people won't condemn.

"So that, Misha, you just give that manuscript what for. Remember this, Misha: I'm a stoker by trade, and I was no bad hand at feeding furnaces. But—well, I'm rather a 'worsen' hand at literature. That's a trade that calls for talent. And 'what a man's not given "from above", he won't find to buy in the shops', says an old Czech proverb."

To the publishers, he wrote:

"I must warn you once more that the manuscript of the first book of the novel *Born of the Storm*, which I

sent you for purposes of information, is not to be put into work until I have done all the necessary editorial work, made all the necessary corrections, additions, etc. . . . I sent you the manuscript in order to get your opinion and comment, and not by any means for publication."

When, on August 21, Ostrovsky completed the first book of *Born of the Storm*, the Sochi Party Committee categorically demanded that he rest. He was prescribed a six-week vacation.

"Today I go on leave," he wrote on August 21.

But no sooner did he cease work, change the rhythm of his days, so long devoted to intensive effort, than his illness made itself felt more cruelly than ever. All the myriad aches and pains that had seemed dormant while he worked now came to life. He had been too busy to feel them, even to notice them. Now they sought revenge.

And so, even during this vacation period, he remained faithful to his time-tried method—"treating" his illness by constant occupation: reading, keeping up a lively correspondence, meeting ever new people. Among his visitors were the participants in an automobile test run and the troupe of the Yermolova Theatre; a group of girl parachute jumpers and a group of students from the Novocherkassk Industrial Institute; the famed flyers, Heroes of the Soviet Union, Valery Chkalov and Alexander Belyakov, and groups of school children. He had long talks with writers and newspapermen. Of an evening, singers, actors, musicians, visiting Sochi on tour or on holiday, would look in to see him.

In the course of this vacation, Ostrovsky examined and discussed a stage version of *How the Steel Was*

Tempered which had been prepared for one of the Moscow theatres.

Thus he returned once more, if only briefly, to his first novel and its characters. And he planned to return to them yet again; for, as we have seen, he hoped to write two more books about them: *Korchagin's Happiness*, a continuation of the novel, and *Pavka's Childhood*—a book for children.

Ostrovsky took great pleasure in the impromptu concerts got up, now and again, by his evening visitors. His ear for music was perfect, and his musical memory outstanding. In his youth he had been past master at the accordion and the guitar, and had loved to sing. Through the long years of illness all this had been out of the question.

"How I wish I could get all my friends together again, and talk my fill with them, and sing our favourite songs," he had written when he was already confined to his bed.

These favourite songs—what were they? The Ukrainian folk songs, familiar from childhood; Russian folk songs; the old songs of the revolutionary movement, and the new, Soviet songs—*Kakhovka*, *Eaglet*, *My Native Land*.

Ostrovsky delighted in the music of Glinka and Beethoven, Chaikovsky and Bizet, Rimsky-Korsakov, Dargomyzhsky, Chopin, Rakhmaninov, Berlioz, Grieg, Rossini.

He loved to hear arias from *The Snow Maiden*, *Sadko*, *The Mermaid*, *Yevgeni Onegin*; the romances of Glinka, Rakhmaninov, Chaikovsky, and their piano pieces.

"What pure, sincere music!" he exclaimed of Chaikovsky's *Seasons*. "Such simple, comprehensible language, expressing great human passions. It reveals to me in myself new sensations and feelings, the existence

of which I never had the time even to suspect. I've seen no little bloodshed and suffering in my life. We grew in difficult times. . . . And we did not see any too much tenderness or love. We had other things to think of."

Music helped him to experience spiritually what he had not experienced in life. It brought him fuller understanding of himself, of other people, of the world.

One day, Dr. Pavlovsky recalls, when the conversation touched on the life of Chaikovsky, Ostrovsky said:

"I have been struck by a remarkable psychological aspect of Chaikovsky's work. In a period of misery and distress, accentuated by his unlucky marriage, a period in which he attempted suicide—in this same period his music rose to heights he had never before attained, and he wrote such wonderful works as the opera *Yevgeni Onegin* and his Fourth Symphony."

Ostrovsky paused a moment, and added:

"Actually, though, I went through something of the same sort myself, in connection with my illness. I was very close to suicide; but I was saved by the urge for creative work, by the mighty urge to be useful, to work, whatever happened. In a word, I found myself again and reaffirmed my aim in life. And from that time on the inexorable 'fate' that overshadowed Chaikovsky's life was transformed for me into joy, into the happiness of a return to the front lines of struggle for my most cherished convictions. From that time on my old battle companion, my revolver, has remained beside me as a witness of my victory over its temptation."

The evening concerts improvised during Ostrovsky's six-week vacation included some of the finest works of the classics and of contemporary composers.

Imagine a glassed-in verandah, not very large. A grand piano. A bed, on which Ostrovsky lies in his

Army tunic, the Order of Lenin on his breast. The windows are all wide open. Tall cypresses sway soundlessly against the deep black of the southern sky.

Pavel Lisitsian stands by the piano, singing of "Lada, my dove", of bold Vasily Gryaznoi, of the blue seas and the lands beyond them.

Sigismund Katz sits at the piano, playing the Overture to *Carmen*, or Glinka's *Valse Fantasia*, or Rakhmaninov's *Italian Polka*.

Music stimulated Ostrovsky's imagination and helped him in the emotional tuning of his books.

Thus, the scene of Seryozha Bruzzhak's death, in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, was written with the radio on, playing Ippolitov-Ivanov's *Caucasian Melodies*. And it was to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that Ostrovsky wrote the scene of Sigismund Rajewski's return to his family in *Born of the Storm*. The powerful, majestic music helped him to sense and to convey the returned revolutionary's emotion, and Jadwiga's overwhelming happiness. In the twelfth chapter of *Born of the Storm* Ostrovsky mentions Rakhmaninov's *Italian Polka*.

In some measure, music was capable of easing the weight of Ostrovsky's blindness.

"I badly miss the sea," he said one day to Sigismund Katz. "This house was to have been built at the shore, but then they thought the sound of the waves might tire me, and shifted the site up here to the hillside. . . . Could you play me something that would recall the sound of the sea, the movement of the waves?"

Katz played Liszt's Etude in D Major, and Ostrovsky was satisfied.

Through these vacation weeks Ostrovsky's thoughts returned constantly to *Born of the Storm*.

His first question to me, when I arrived in Sochi that September, concerned the novel.

"Well," he asked, "how do you see it? Will my book stir people's hearts? Will it rouse them to struggle, to heroism? Or had I better keep it here at home, and forget it was ever written? I've no desire to publish raw, uninteresting material."

Of an afternoon, on the sunlit verandah, we talked of the manuscript, of its best passages, of its weaknesses.

And of an evening, in his darkened room, he would talk of his dreams, of those inmost thoughts in which a man's soul is so wholly revealed.

"Every day of life, to me," he said, "is a day of struggle against tremendous pain and suffering. That has been so for ten years—ten years of life. Yet you see me smile, and my smile is sincere and happy."

With anger and disgust, he said:

"The egoist is the easiest to down. He lives within himself, and for himself. And once his ego is hurt, he has nothing to live by. He sees nothing before him but the dark night of egoism and doom. Whereas a man who lives not only for himself, a man who merges himself with the life of society, who lives as one with his country and his people—such a man is hard to down. To kill him, you have to kill all that surrounds him, to destroy his country, to destroy all life."

The civil war raging in Spain more and more occupied Ostrovsky's thoughts.

A map of Spain hung by his bed, stuck with red and black flaglets to mark the line of the fronts. Morning and evening, after the radio news broadcasts, the flags would be shifted.

His dreams—they knew no bounds. But one among them was dearer, more cherished, than all the rest: the

dream of helping to increase the might of our Socialist Motherland.

"If I might multiply my country's, our Republic's might!" he exclaimed.

And, angrily:

"Sometimes, talking to me, some slobbering idiot begins to complain that his wife is unfaithful, say, and now he has nothing to live for, nothing left to him in life, and all that sort of rot. And I think to myself, if I had what that man has: his health, his arms and legs, his ability to move about the boundless world we live in (that is a dangerous dream, and I don't allow myself to dream it)—if I had what that man has, what then? And in my thoughts I get up, young, strong, erect. I dress, and go out onto the balcony, and life lies there before me.... What then? No, I couldn't simply walk. I'd race headlong—I couldn't help it! I'd race off to Moscow, maybe—running all the way beside the train. And in Moscow I'd go to the Motor Works, and make straight for the furnaces, and open a furnace door, just as fast as I could, to get a whiff of the coal smell, and feed the furnace full. Oh, I'd do sixty, seventy days' work in one.... I'd be so greedy to live, so mad to live. How much I could get done, how much energy I'd have to spend, before I tired! Released from immobility, nine years of immobility—why, I could never sit still, could never stop work until I'd sated my longing for it."

On September 30, Ostrovsky was visited by a correspondent of the *British News Chronicle*. The conversation, which occupied three hours, touched upon Hitler, Mussolini, and fascism; upon the threat of war; upon the historic achievements of the Soviet people; upon the future.

"Policy, abroad," Ostrovsky said, "is directed by people who ought to be in an insane asylum. One maniac is bad enough, if he gets hold of a revolver; but what are we to say of people who are capable of flinging tens of millions, their whole nation, into slaughter, of drenching the whole world in blood?... The readers of bourgeois newspapers are victims of bandits of the pen.... That abominable monstrosity, the bourgeois press! What a situation for the journalist: he must lie for his money, or go flying out. If he's honest to the core, he'll refuse to lie; but the majority will submit. It's not easy, there, to keep your name unsullied. And that's a dreadful life to live. When newspapermen lie, they lie deliberately. They always know the truth, yet they betray it. That's prostitution.... In the capitalist countries today... whole political parties lie, in all their activities. They can't let out the truth, for then the masses would abandon them. They're compelled to manoeuvre, trying to retain the support of two groups: the ruling group and the toiling masses...."

Of England, he said, "I don't want to be offensive; but there's no clarity in her political stand. One can never know what she'll do next day—in which direction she'll turn, and in whose company."

The correspondent offered no rebuttal. He told Ostrovsky:

"I visited Garvin, not so long ago—the publisher of *The Observer*, for which I write a weekly article. We talked six hours and more. Garvin is closely connected with Lord Astor... and he's well informed on every aspect of English policy. I described to him in great detail how things are going in the Soviet Ukraine: collectivisation, and the tremendous cultural advance among the people, and education.... But I notice that

my articles for *The Observer* get so doctored up before they're printed that nothing is left of what I'm trying to say, and the reader can hardly get a true idea of the U.S.S.R. Well, and when I told him what I'd seen in the Ukraine, he said that yes, the Bolsheviks had done no little, but much more could have been done under German leadership. He stands for Hitler. And not only he."

This talk upset Ostrovsky deeply. Garvin and Astor, then, preferred "German leadership". They stood for Hitler. And not only they.

Yes, he must make haste! And decision came.

"I plan to leave for Moscow on October 22, to hasten the final editing of *Born of the Storm*," he wrote to the director of the State Literary Publishing House. "The comrades here object to the trip.... But I cannot stay here passively waiting for winter to come. Every day of life is dear. And I am off for Moscow. There we will organise a broad conference, and I will set all other work aside and get down to the first volume, so that it can come out as soon as possible, because the youth will not forgive me any further delay."

OSTROVSKY'S LAST MONTHS

He loved his mother deeply.

"There is a wonderful being, to whom a man can never pay all of his debt—his mother," he once said to Dr. Pavlovsky.

"To Olga Osipovna Ostrovskaya, my mother—unfailing shock worker and my faithful sentry," he wrote for her on the fly-leaf of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

Olga Osipovna feared this trip to Moscow, feared the parting with her son. Full of grievous forebodings, she fell ill.

Worried by her melancholy, Ostrovsky asked her to come and sit awhile beside him. When she came, he took her hand in his and pressed it lovingly.

"Why do you grieve so, my dearest?" he asked her tenderly. "I must go—you know that, surely. I'll finish my book in Moscow, and turn it in to the publishers. And there are other things I must get done. The time will fly, and in early spring I'll be with you again. We'll rest here together, out in the sunshine, read books, and listen to that dear nightingale of ours that sings so beautifully in the garden every morning.... Bend down and kiss me, to show that you agree."

She did not bend and kiss him. She did not say a word.

He guessed her thoughts.

"We're not children, after all," he said. "We understand that—well, anything may happen. But it won't come so soon. Be cheerful, as you've always been. There are so many good things to look forward to! I'll write you often, and I'll be thinking of you every day."

He begged her to lie down and rest, and not to worry. She kissed him and reluctantly left his bedside.

This was on October 21. The next day Ostrovsky set out on the last of his "northern expeditions"—from Sochi to Moscow.

They reached Moscow on October 24, late at night. Ostrovsky remained on the train until morning, and then moved on to his familiar rooms in Gorky Street.

He got in touch with the Central Committee of the League, and with the Writers' Union. It was agreed that the manuscript *Born of the Storm* be discussed at a meeting of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union to be held on November 15.

In the meantime, Ostrovsky returned again and again to his manuscript, consulting his editors, revising, improving.

As before, he was anxious, uneasy. Had he made a success of his new book? Had he justified the trust put in him? Would *Born of the Storm* captain a new army of readers? This new blow he had aimed against the foe—how powerful would it turn out to be, and how well aimed?

The Sovietsky Pisatel (Soviet Writer) Publishing House informed him that it was undertaking a new edition of *How the Steel Was Tempered*. He insisted on a printing of a million copies.

No, it was not glory he was seeking.

"Don't you see," he said to the editor, "a million copies—they're my soldiers, my Red Army men. I'm their

captain. I lead them against the foe. And we still have tremendous battles to fight. There are many still who do not realise what fascism really means. Imagine a madman, running through the streets with a bomb in his hand. He may throw it anywhere. I lie here, sometimes, and think of those savage storm troopers marching by torchlight through the streets of the German cities. I can almost hear their wild howling—'Heil Hitler!' And so I want to arm our Leaguers, our youth, all our Soviet people, with the weapon that books can be. If I can't do that, why the devil should I write at all?... I know what *How the Steel Was Tempered* can do. I've already put it to the proof."

Yes, he knew what *How the Steel Was Tempered* could do; but he did not yet know what he might hope of *Born of the Storm*. That was still to be demonstrated.

November 15—the long-awaited day! As evening drew on, Ostrovsky's rooms gradually filled with people.

His bed was carried into the big, bright central room that was generally used when there were visitors. He lay propped high on his pillows, tense, but smiling. People came up to press his hand. There were many whom he had never met before. He kept their hands long in his, talking and joking.

When everyone had come, and the seats had been arranged so that all could see Ostrovsky's face, a representative of the Central Committee of the Young Communist League declared the meeting open.

Ostrovsky was the first to speak. His voice was low, as always, but he spoke distinctly and with great energy.

"It will surprise you, perhaps, that I speak now—that the author should be the first speaker.

"I have been awaiting this meeting with a feeling of great trust that it will help me in many things.

"I have one urgent request to make, a request I have many times repeated in letters to the comrades and in talks with them: that our discussion take the following lines, for my benefit and our common good.

"Point out to me, with Bolshevik truth—severely, rigorously, if need be—every shortcoming, every deficiency in my work. . . .

"I earnestly request you not to treat me as a beginner in literature. I have been writing for six years, and that is time enough for me to have learned something of writing. Keep your demands high, very high. That is the main thing I want to say to you. Treat me as a writer who answers for his work in fullest measure—answers both as an artist and as a Communist."

Ostrovsky called upon all present to turn on him "the big guns" of criticism. Criticism, he assured them, would not unman him; it would encourage him, increase his strength, intensify his will to continue and complete the work he had begun.

The demands were kept high. The "big guns" were turned on the novel in its every aspect—style, character portrayal, interpretation of historical facts.

But the general opinion was unanimous: that the author had scored a new victory.

A. Serafimovich, the first to speak after the author, discussed all the main characters of the novel. In conclusion, he said:

"At first your *How the Steel Was Tempered* seemed warmer, closer to my heart, than *Born of the Storm*. But I must say that your craftsmanship has advanced. The material you had to deal with was so vast, so involved

—yet how wonderfully you have arranged and organised it, knit it into one splendid, integrated whole.”

The next to speak was Alexander Fadeyev.

“*How the Steel Was Tempered* must have been easier to write,” he said. “*Born of the Storm* is not autobiography. It is a harder thing to write.”

Valeria Gerasimova dwelt in particular detail on Andri Ptakha, “a rank-and-file young worker who rises to the heights of revolutionary heroism, rises to glorious self-abnegation.”

“He is the central character,” Ostrovsky put in. “If he gains hearts, that is one victory won. He is the main character.”

Some of the speakers, concerned for Ostrovsky’s health, proposed that one or another writer be asked to help him. This proposal he rejected at once, and categorically.

From the criticism made at this meeting, Ostrovsky drew one conclusion:

“The book needs to be improved by several degrees, so that I can come out with it and not be ashamed. Many people consider that a writer’s first book is his most vivid work, and most profound, because he puts all he has learned in life into it; and that a second book is more difficult to write. I shall think and work over all your remarks, dear friends. We should have more such friendly gatherings.”

He sincerely thanked all present for their criticism and promised, after one day’s rest (“I shall permit myself that luxury”), to set to work on the manuscript.

Editing a book of such size would have been a good three months’ job even for a healthy man. Yet Ostrovsky undertook to do it in one month.

"I suffer with insomnia," he said, "and that will help. Some treat their illnesses by rest, others—by work."

And so he promised, in a month's time, to turn in to the Central Committee of the League the first volume of *Born of the Storm*, ready for publication.

The work began.

Time after time, in the course of his long working day, Ostrovsky would ask his secretaries if they were not tired. He insisted that they rest, that they take time off for lunch or dinner, that they relieve one another regularly. For himself, however, he denied all need of rest. He begrudged even the brief moments spent on food, hastening always to return to his manuscript.

Absorbed in his work, he forgot the pain that tortured him, forgot his infinite weariness, forgot that man cannot live without nourishment.

His fatigue betrayed itself only in the growing frequency of his requests for a sip of water to wet his parched lips, and in the faintness and dull timbre of his voice.

He slept little and badly, and morning often found him in a state of utter exhaustion. His family watched with deep alarm. He was spending literally his last reserves of energy. They begged him to rest, to put off his work, if only for the shortest time. But he would hear of no delay. Mercilessly, he drove himself and all his "staff".

On the table by his bed, on the chairs, on the couch, lay copies of the manuscript, each with the comments of the editor who had worked on it. Page by page, the work proceeded. First the actual text would be read, then the comments made on the given page in every editor's copy, and also the comments recorded in the stenographic report of the recent conference. Weighing

every word and sentence in his mind, Ostrovsky would alter, add, delete, establishing the final text of his novel. And, decision taken, he would hurry on his helpers.

"Forward, forward, dear friends!"—was his constant cry.

Day after day, in three shifts, the painstaking labour continued, interrupted only for meals, for the reading of newspapers and correspondence, and for the radio news broadcasts.

On Constitution Day, December 5, a demonstration poured down Gorky Street, past Ostrovsky's flat, towards the Red Square. The shouts of the crowd reached him in his room, the joyous singing, the bracing music of the bands. And he had the feeling that he, too, marched in the ranks of the people.

"Now I'm crossing the Red Square," he said, "passing the Mausoleum where Lenin lies."

He felt himself so deeply a part of the demonstration that he could speak so with full truth.

The stimulus received that day had its effect in his work. On December 14 he turned the last page of his manuscript.

To his Mother, in Sochi, he wrote:

"I finished today all that remained to be done on the first book of *Born of the Storm*. So that I've kept my word to the League Central Committee—to finish the book by December 15.

"Worked 'three shifts' all the last month. Wore out all my secretaries terribly. Made them work from morning until far into the night, with no days off. Poor girls! I don't know what they think of me, but I certainly treated them cruelly.

"That's over now, though. I'm more tired than I can say. But the book is done, and it will be out three weeks

from now—150,000 copies, in a paper-backed edition. Later, it will be put out by several publishing houses, in a total of something like half a million copies.”

Of his plans, he wrote:

“Now I’ve a month of rest ahead. I’ll work very little—if I can hold out in such idleness, of course. You and I are much alike that way—aren’t we, Mother? Still, I’ll make myself rest. I can read, and listen to music, and get some sleep. Six hours doesn’t seem to be enough.”

After resting Ostrovsky planned to start work on the second book of *Born of the Storm*. In one of his folders lay résumés of historical materials studied in preparation for this book, and a few roughly drafted pages. He hoped to complete the novel (books two and three) by the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution—in less than a year’s time.

But this letter to his mother was the last thing he was ever to write.

December 15—the day when Ostrovsky received the League Central Committee decision prescribing him a month’s vacation—brought the final, fatal illness.

Yet, that day, he telephoned me to ask:

“Does Madrid hold?”

Madrid still held; and Ostrovsky exclaimed happily:

“Good for them! Then I must hold out too.”

But, a moment later, he added sadly:

“Only it doesn’t look as if I will.”

He tried to reassure us all.

“Never you fear, dear friends,” he said. “I won’t surrender this time any more than last. I can’t die yet. I’ve got my youngsters to get out of their predicament. I can’t very well leave them to the legionaries, can I?”

Death “walked near to the house” that held the heroes of his novel—Andri Ptakha, Rajmond, Leon,

Olesya, Sara. It "sought some cranny by which to enter". Ostrovsky stood guard, seeking to help them in their trouble.

But now he himself was attacked by death. It had found the cranny it sought, had crept into his house.

"We'll fight to the last breath!" Andri Ptakha cries fiercely, in the forest lodge.

Ostrovsky, too, fought to his last breath.

But his illness attacked with such inhuman ferocity that, weakened and exhausted by the past years of intensive labour, he was unable to withstand its onslaught.

All the doctors' efforts were to no avail. They could not halt the attack. Death was approaching.

Ostrovsky met his death courageously as he had lived his life.

One day—it was December 21—he asked the nurse on duty in his room how long she had been working at her profession.

"Twenty-six years," she answered.

"I suppose you've seen no little grief and trouble, doing such work as yours."

"Yes, plenty of that, of course."

"And now it's me," he continued. "I won't bring you much pleasure either."

The nurse could barely restrain her tears.

"What are you saying?" she cried, in a vain effort at reassurance. "You'll be better in a few days, I'm sure. And that will be my greatest pleasure."

"No, no," he said. "I realise my condition only too well. It's no pleasure I'll be bringing you. And you know, it's such a pity! I only needed one year more to finish up my work. I've so much left unfinished! And the League—it was still expecting much of me."

That night, when his wife sat watching by his bedside, he said to her:

"I'm feeling bad, dear little Raya. Dreadful pain. The doctors don't tell me the truth. It may end badly this time, I can feel that."

He lay still awhile. Only his eyebrows, sharply drawn together, revealed the desperate stress that he was under.

"What I say to you now," he went on, "may be the last I'll ever say intelligibly. . . . I haven't lived my life so badly. I made my life myself, of course. Nothing came of itself, easily. But I fought always, and—you know yourself—I wasn't downed. And now, I want to tell you this: If life should ever try to treat you badly—remember me. And another thing. Wherever you may be, whatever work you do, study and learn. Never give that up. Without study there can be no growth. And remember our mothers. They've spent all their lives caring for us. I'm terribly sorry for them. We owe them so much. So very much. And we've given them so little, yet. Take good care of them. Remember them always."

He lost consciousness. When he came to himself he asked his brother Dmitry, who had relieved his wife:

"Did I moan?"

He had not moaned. Triumphantly, he exclaimed:

"There! Death is after me in good earnest, this time, but I yield no ground. Death can't scare me!"

Again he lost consciousness. And again, coming to himself some hours later, he asked the doctor:

"Did I moan?"

"No."

"Good! That shows that death can't get me down."

It was only by oxygen that he was still kept alive.

For the last time, he was looking death in the eyes. It had come close as never before; but he did not waver. Only one thought disturbed him:

"I'm so deep in debt to our young people," he whispered faintly. "I want to live. . . . I need to live. . . ."

Nikolai Ostrovsky died on December 22, 1936, at ten minutes to eight in the evening.

For three days his coffin stood in the hall of the Writers' Club; and for three days the flow of people never ceased. Thousands upon thousands, of every age and every profession, lined up along Vorovsky Street, around Vosstaniye Square, and down Herzen Street. With slow, heavy step, to the sound of mournful music, they passed through the black-draped hall and past the coffin—rendering final tribute to the soldier, the writer, and impressing for all time in their memories his calm features, his lofty forehead, the firm outline of his slightly parted lips.

At the corners of the coffin, the guard of honour came and went in mournful silence: writers, sailors, Red Army men, Young Pioneers, famed actors, flyers, Comrade Shvernik and girl parachute jumper Nina Kamneva, polar explorers and architects, Chapayev's son and Furmanov's daughter, delegations from Kiev and Leningrad, Shepetovka and Sochi, Kharkov and Rostov.

Stronger than the bonds of kinship, closer than the bonds of friendship, were the ties that bound these people, one and all, with this man whom they were honouring; for it was to build their happiness that he had lived and worked. Science had not been able to preserve his life. But he was not dead. Death could not kill him.

On the evening of December 25 Ostrovsky was cremated. On December 26, surrounded by a military guard of honour and followed by thousands of mourners, the

urn containing his ashes was taken to the Novo-Devi-
chye cemetery. Here, on the communist burying ground,
a brief memorial meeting was held, opened by Alexan-
der Fadeyev. The speakers included representatives of
the All-Union League Central Committee, the Ukrainian
League Central Committee, and the Sochi Party organ-
isation. Ostrovsky's brother also said a few words.

At twenty minutes to three, three rifle volleys sound-
ed in salute, and the *Internationale* was sung.

The urn was bricked into a niche in the cemetery
wall. Sixteen years later, however, in October 1952, it
was removed from the niche and buried in the ground,
beside the grave of Dmitry Furmanov.

The first edition of *Born of the Storm* came out on
the day of Ostrovsky's funeral.

Its frontispiece, a portrait of the writer, was framed
in black, reminding the reader that the novel was never
to be completed. On the last page, a brief publisher's
note read:

"Reader:

"This is the first book of a novel planned to be made
up of three books. It was written by a man bound to
his bed by fearful illness, and was completed only a few
days before his death.

"Death struck the pen from his fingers at the very
height of his creative work."

"HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED"

The first Russian edition of *How the Steel Was Tempered* came out in 10,300 copies. The sixty-second edition, appearing in the year of the author's death, brought total printings up to two million. It is not many works of fiction that arouse such immediate and universal interest.

Where, then, lies the secret of the extraordinary success of *How the Steel Was Tempered*?

The novel is a heroic chronicle of the author's generation, a broad and colourful panorama of the period in which it is laid. It belongs to the mainstream of Soviet literature; and in this mainstream it has its forebears, its contemporaries, and its followers.

Strong ties of kinship bind it with Gorky's *Mother*, that classic work of proletarian literature, and with the characters peopling that work—Pavel Vlasov, Andrei Nakhodka, Pelageya Nilovna, Natasha. There is something symbolic to my mind, in the fact that Vlasov and Korchagin bear the same name—Pavel.

In the first publication of Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe*, which appeared in 1918, there was a scene in which the characters complain, "We are hungry. We are weary. We can walk no more." The Agricultural Labourer demands, "Hungry? Weary? Can steel be weary?" The Landress answers, "We are not steel." But the Smith cries, "Let us be steel!"



Nikolai Ostrovsky towards the end of his life

In this passage Mayakovsky anticipated, as it were, the significance and purpose of Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*; for it was Ostrovsky's aim not only to show how some were tempered, but also to help others to temper themselves, to become steel.

In the main, the book is devoted to the pre-revolutionary period, the years of revolution and Civil War, and the period of restoration and Socialist reconstruction of the national economy. It hardly at all reflects the years of the First Five-Year Plan.

Yet—chronologically, it might seem, turned to face the past—the book in reality was not only contemporary, but faced to the future, looking far, far ahead. How was this attained? Why were Ostrovsky's characters, and particularly Pavel Korchagin, so unhampered by the actual dates named in the novel?

Alexander Fadeyev, after reading *How the Steel Was Tempered*, wrote to Ostrovsky:

"I liked your novel from many points of view. Above all, for your profound understanding, your deep feeling, of the Party spirit, expressed with such simplicity, sincerity, and truth as I have not encountered (among writers) except in Furmanov; for your new perception of things, as expressed above all in the central character, Pavel Korchagin. For all the unusual turn that his fate takes, Korchagin is highly typical, standing out in complete contrast to the young people of the nineteenth century who have been so splendidly portrayed in the works of many writers, Russian and foreign. More: in all our Soviet literature, it seems to me, I have not as yet encountered a character so attractive as Korchagin, so clean of soul and at the same time so alive."

Ostrovsky's novel covers a considerable stretch of time, and is densely populated with the most varied char-

acters—people of different classes, generations, views, and fates. But its central character, its “axis”, obviously, is Pavel Korchagin; and it is to Korchagin’s portrayal, to the process of his development, that the writer’s attention is chiefly devoted.

Ostrovsky does not present Korchagin ready-made. He shows him to us in process of formation, from childhood and to final maturity—both as a citizen and as a Communist.

At the age of fourteen Pavel makes the acquaintance of Fyodor Zhukhrai, a sailor from the Baltic fleet, member of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.) from 1915.

“Zhukhrai took a liking to the bright youngster....

“‘Your mother tells me you’re fond of a scrap,’ he said, smiling. ‘“He’s as bad as a game-cock,” she says.’ Zhukhrai chuckled approvingly. ‘As a matter of fact, it doesn’t hurt to be a fighter, as long as you know whom to fight and why.’

“Pavel was not sure whether Zhukhrai was joking or serious.

“‘I don’t fight for nothing,’ he retorted, ‘I always fight for what’s right and fair.’”

“What’s right and fair”, and what is not “right and fair”—such, with no in-betweens, is his criterion, his moral divide, so to speak, for all that goes on in the world around him.

To the boy stoker Pavel Korchagin, Fyodor Zhukhrai—storm-weathered Russian sailor and Bolshevik—becomes a hero, to be admired and copied with all the ardour of youth.

Zhukhrai teaches Pavel never to lose his presence of mind, whatever the circumstances; when he must fight, to do his fighting gaily, with reckless spirit; to keep a stiff upper lip through every trial; to seek always and

everywhere ways and means of gaining the victory over the enemy; if need be, to lay down his life—but at the dearest price that he can manage.

With inspired, insuperable determination young workers dig into a hill, laying the bed for a railway branch line to bring in firewood for a freezing city. And, seeing them at work, Zhukhrai exclaims, "This is where the steel is tempered."

Why are these words, the title thought of the whole novel, made to refer to what might at first glance seem so prosaic a scene? For the reason that this is the real foundation of Korchagin's courage—the constant urge to action that people may be happy. This is the aim that inspires him always, in battle and in labour. And is not that why we call him a hero?

Korchagin's life is shown us in its wonderful unity, its unfaltering truth to purpose, its soul-inspiring passion. We can imagine Korchagin in other situations than those described in the novel, without the slightest doubt as to how he will react, what course he will follow, what say and what undertake.

Korchagin's principles, so fully expressed in his attitude to labour and in all his public activity, are shown no less convincingly in those relationships which we call a person's "private life".

Tonya Tumanova—never, it might have seemed, could Pavel forget her. Yet he breaks with her, completely, irrevocably. Why?

"You know, of course, that I loved you," he says in parting, "and even now my love might return, but for that you must be with us. I am not the Pavlusha I was before. And I would be a poor husband to you if you expect me to put you before the Party. For I shall always put the Party first, and you and my other loved

ones second. . . . You had the courage to love a working man, but you cannot love an idea."

No, Tonya cannot love Korchagin's ideas. And that completely changes his attitude towards her.

There is no contradiction, as we see, between his private life and the public interest. His ideas determine not only his approach to life; they determine his feelings, his hatreds and his loves. He can never find happiness with a woman, with a friend and comrade, who does not share his ideas.

Korchagin marries Taya Kyutsam. In asking her to be his wife, he speaks of her urgent need to get away from the narrow, stifling world of her family "into the fresh air", and offers her his help, seeing this as his unquestionable duty.

"Our compact will be in force until you grow up to be a real human being, a true Bolshevik," he says to Taya. "If I can't help you in that I am not worth a kopek."

Severe and uncompromising in his demands upon himself, Korchagin is no less exacting towards others. This we are shown in the most varied circumstances, in Korchagin's encounters with the negative characters portrayed in the novel. We are shown, too, how moral degeneration goes inevitably hand in hand with betrayal of principles.

Why is Korchagin unable to endure Failo and Gribov? Because of their attitude towards women. Failo's revolting talk of Korotayeva, his filthy boasting, make Korchagin's blood boil.

A scoundrel and libertine, a base and immoral man, cannot be a true revolutionary, a true Communist—this thought of Korchagin's is exemplified in the novel by

Dubava, whom Ostrovsky treats with wrathful satire. Dubava's very appearance, when Korchagin last meets him, repels. His face is ashen, with dark circles under the eyes, and his breath reeks of alcohol. Clearly, he has sunk very low. But he still tries to swagger.

"Are you going to tell me whom I should sleep with?" he shouts furiously. "I've had enough of your preaching. Now get back where you came from! Run along and tell them all that Dubava has taken to drinking and whoring."

And Korchagin, walking slowly down the stairs, mutters,

"The swine!"

Korchagin is a very human, a very typical figure, richly endowed with just such traits of character as many other people manifest, in one degree or another, in various circumstances. He is not portrayed as an exception, a superman, paling the other characters of the book and pushing them into the background. No, his comrades are of the same mettle as he.

Sergei Bruzzhak, Korchagin's childhood friend, figuring only in the first part of the novel, is his close comrade, his equal in every way. Sergei, too, is very fully portrayed: in his private life and in his public activities; in his relations with Rita Ustinovich, at home with his family, and on the battle-field.

It is in connection with Sergei Bruzzhak that Ostrovsky expresses a thought very important to the understanding of the book as a whole—a thought deeply imbued with the humanism that distinguishes Korchagin. Describing a fierce-fought battle in which Sergei takes part, Ostrovsky writes:

"Sergei's hand did not falter. He knew that he would have to go on killing, he, Sergei, who was capable of

such tender love, such steadfast friendship. He was not vicious or cruel by nature, but he knew that he must fight these misguided soldiers whom the world's parasites had whipped up into a frenzy of bestial hatred and sent against his native land. And he, Sergei, would kill in order to hasten the day when men would kill one another no longer."

A character figuring throughout the book is Pavel's brother Artem—the elder Korchagin, as Ostrovsky in one passage calls him. Artem does not resemble either Pavel or Sergei. He lives his life differently, along other lines than they. He helps Pavel frequently, and stands up for him when he is in trouble. The brothers are deeply attached to one another. But Artem has not gone through the schooling that the Young Communist League has given Pavel, and politically he lags far behind his brother. Ostrovsky shows us his gradual development, which leads him in the end to join the Communist Party.

In every character portrayed in the novel, Ostrovsky has found and touched what may be called the main chord. They all ring true—central characters and incidental ones, good and bad, men and boys, girls and women.

Highly significant among the feminine characters is Rita Ustinovich, who comes into the novel at about the same time that Tonya Tumanova is relegated to the background.

Tonya has been weighed in the balance and found wanting—empty of soul, incapable of lofty feeling.

And as though to fill the place that has been left vacant, Rita comes into the book, to remain one of its central characters. She first appears as a member of the Political Department of a Red Army division—"a girl

of eighteen with dark bobbed hair, in a new khaki tunic with a narrow leather belt”.

The description could hardly be briefer; yet one of the “main chords” of Rita’s character, the restraint and outward severity that constitute her charm, has already been sounded.

Rita Ustinovich, among the feminine characters of the novel, occupies much the same place as Pavel Korchagin among the male characters. It is only natural, therefore, that the relations between these two characters, the dramatic crossing of their fates, should receive such close attention, and should allow the author to present and develop problems of ethics and morals.

With what warm sympathy Ostrovsky describes Korchagin’s feeling for Rita—“his friend and comrade, his political guide”! No other girl evokes such thoughts in Korchagin as she.

And Rita is worthy of this feeling.

Nor does her own feeling for Korchagin remain a secret to the reader. We see it not only in her diary, but in her actions. The fur-lined jacket that she sends him when he is freezing at Boyarka is a gift not merely of friendship, but of love.

“The gruff simplicity of Zhukhrai,” Rita writes in her diary, “is far more to my taste than all Olshinsky’s polished European manners.”

“Zhukhrai”—she writes; but, clearly, it is Korchagin that she means. And that is why the luxurious jacket presented to her by Olshinsky is immediately sent off to Boyarka, that Pavel’s freezing limbs may be warmed, not only by the soft fur, but by her thoughts of him.

We encounter many people in the novel—people of different generations, of different nationalities, of dif-

ferent views; friends, and foes. And each of them is alive, each clearly marked by the period in which he lives.

The book deals with two truths—that of the past and that of the present. But it carries within it, too, a third truth—that which Gorky has so aptly termed the truth of the future.

"BORN OF THE STORM"

How the Steel Was Tempered and *Born of the Storm* are not simply two successive books by the same author. They are bound together much more closely than that.

Asked whether his new book had anything in common with his first work, Ostrovsky replied, "The two books are akin. Only *How the Steel Was Tempered* compresses into its pages the story of an entire generation over the course of sixteen years, whereas the new book treats more fully of a single episode in the revolutionary struggle, covering only three or four months."

The very name of the new work binds it up with the old; for the novel that Pavel Korchagin writes in *How the Steel Was Tempered* is called *Born of the Storm*.

Though akin in central theme, however, the two books are not by any means mere variants one of the other.

No, they are very different. And the difference that I have in mind goes far deeper than the obvious ones of plot and cast. The theme itself is differently treated, is approached from different angles.

At the time when *Born of the Storm* was conceived—in 1933—Europe had already entered the road that was to lead to Munich. Ostrovsky never for a moment forgot the growing danger of fascism, the urgent need to combat this danger. It was of the past that he wrote—

but it was the present, yes, and the future that he had in mind. What he was trying to do was to seize the whistle cord, like his Andri Ptakha—Korchagin's "double", if I may so put it, in the new book—and sound a piercing, insistent blast; not only to remind us of the danger, but to arouse us to courage, to vigilance, to readiness for battle. It rings out, that insistent, calling blast, from every page of *Born of the Storm*.

The action of the novel takes place in late 1918 and early 1919, on the territory of the Western Ukraine.

Cannon roar. Red Army units and partisan detachments battle the German invaders. But it is not the people who gain power. Power is seized by the Polish bourgeoisie and militarists. On the estate of the Counts Mogelnicki, the counter-revolution organises its staff.

The forces of the Revolution are also organising, led by the Communist Sigismund Rajewski, a steeled and experienced fighter. The Communists conduct propaganda among the workers and the peasantry. Organisers are sent out to form partisan detachments. An uprising begins.

The revolutionary workers—Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Czechs—unite ever more closely in the bitter struggle. Shoulder to shoulder with their elders, we are shown the youth: Rajewski's son, Rajmond; Sara Mikhelson, the cobbler's daughter, who works in a dress-making shop; Olesya Kovallo, daughter of the pump-house mechanic; the stoker Andri Ptakha—that rebel spirit, whom the underground steels and disciplines; the young Czech baker Prenicek, and all the rest.

"It is my aim to show the profound internationalism of their struggle, the heartfelt friendship that unites them, their true heroism," Ostrovsky wrote of the young

people portrayed in his novel. "Differing in character, but united by their class origin, these youthful helpers of the Party, its scouts and sentries, are worthy sons of their fathers."

There is much of Korchagin in these young people—and, above all else, Korchagin's fortitude.

Even nine-year-old Vasilyok displays this fortitude, when he is working his way through the coal to rescue Andri.

"Vasilyok began clearing away the coal, dragging aside the heavy lumps. One of them rolled back and struck his bare feet painfully. He fell, and began to cry. But when he had had his cry he got up and set to work again."

Ostrovsky does not make the boy do anything beyond his power, anything that might seem impossible or improbable for a child of his age. But the Korchagin strain is there.

The tempering of the steel, its testing for courage and fortitude—that is what Ostrovsky shows us in both his novels. That is his central theme, from which he could not and would not depart.

The steeled Communist Sigismund Rajewski, who exerts so great and wholesome an influence on the youth in *Born of the Storm*, brings to mind the sailor Fyodor Zhukhrai in *How the Steel Was Tempered*; but this is resemblance, not duplication. Rajewski is a complete and individual character. Andri Ptakha is one of the chief vehicles of the Korchagin spirit in the new novel; but he, too, is a new and vividly portrayed individuality.

Continuing his main theme in his new book, Ostrovsky approaches it from a new angle. The plot is of an entirely different type, and the characters—good and bad—are new and different.

I shall allow myself to dwell in some detail on two of the characters, Andri Ptakha and Rajmond Rajewski. It is in these two, in their stories, in all their conduct, that the Korchagin strain is most clearly expressed.

Andri Ptakha, as Ostrovsky himself declared, is the main character of the novel; and, naturally enough, it is Andri who is the hero of one of the most important incidents in the first book of the novel—the memorable scene in the boiler room.

Andri is so portrayed that he cannot but win the reader from the first: a strong, stocky, attractive young workman, daring, audacious—yes, and how splendidly he plays the guitar! In a word, a lusty fellow, overflowing with vitality.

Ostrovsky is clearly very fond of Andri; but he does not idealise him, is not blind to his shortcomings. Here is what he makes Rajmond Rajewski say of him:

“Well, there’s Andri Ptakha. Brave as they make them, only he’s awfully wild, and likely to overdo things. A good head, I’d say, but hot and reckless.”

Andri himself seems to sense his friends’ doubts of him as a participant in the struggle.

“No, Rajmond,” he exclaims, “you just don’t understand me. A noise-maker, you think, and nothing behind it. Can’t you see my heart is longing too for something real in life?”

But the elder Rajewski, when Rajmond speaks of Andri’s recklessness, says, smiling:

“Why, then you’ll simply have to keep him in check at the first. Caution will come with the realisation that he may harm others, not only himself.”

And, learning of Andri’s friendship with Olesya, he adds:



Ostrovsky's home in Sochi, now a museum

"I see. Well, that's not bad at all. Friendship is a wonderful thing."

Thus, in a thousand different ways, now direct, now more or less indirect, does Ostrovsky build up for us the figure of his central character, Andri Ptakha—a figure youthfully fresh and irresistibly attractive.

When, on the last page of the novel, Andri, Rajmond, and their friends are surrounded by the enemy, it is Andri who cries:

"We'll fight to the last breath! Get down on the floor. I'll shoot through the window. We'll never surrender alive, so we might as well sell our lives dearly."

Rajmond, we have reason to believe, was portrayed with greater difficulty than Andri. Ostrovsky worked very hard on Rajmond, in the effort—as he himself confessed—to make him more "earthy". In Andri much is determined by his fervour, his inborn daring, the youth-

ful turbulence of his emotions. In Rajmond, other traits predominate: composure, sober logic, human dignity, a sense of responsibility not only for himself, but for others. Rajmond is the son of a veteran revolutionary, experienced in underground activities; and, in describing him, Ostrovsky seems to say: birth not only *tells*, but *obliges*.

For all that, Rajmond remains a highly romantic figure.

Imperiously ordered by young Mogelnicki to look after the horses, Rajmond, who has just been chopping wood for these same Mogelnickis, returns proudly:

"I'm no lackey of yours."

When the horses bolt, Rajmond stops them, saving Countess Ludwiga's life at the risk of his own. But, prompted by a fine class pride and dignity, he rejects the Countess' gifts and money.

There is no hint of pose in Rajmond's actions, no hint of affectation. He is a revolutionary fighter, the son of a Communist—and he cannot act otherwise.

Both Rajmond and Andri indulge, at times, in dreams. But their dreams differ—just as their natures do.

"New thoughts, new dreams filled Andri's mind," we read. "Suppose, some day, he were to become a famous fighter? Yes, and tales of him would spread through the farms and villages, and his name would strike terror to the hearts of the foe. And—youthful, daring—he would sweep forward at the head of his squadrons, cleansing his native soil of its oppressors. And *pan* Barankiewicz, fleeing, would cry to that scraggy cat, his wife, 'Why, it's that same Ptakha, confound him, that same stoker from the boiler room at our factory!'"

A calling, intoxicating dream, brimming over with impassioned valour, with impetuous daring.

Rajmond, too, has his dream, to which he aspires with all his being—a prophetic dream that comes to him one night:

“He and his father, standing at the top of a tall burial mound. Around them, the boundless steppe. Night. But off in the east, a bright red glow. And the steppe seems to be breaking into blaze. The wind brings the grim roar of approaching storm. From afar, as far as the eye can see, come wave on wave of human multitudes. Banners, flooded with light, glow brighter than flame. Steel glitters. The earth rocks beneath the horses’ hooves. And over it all floats a mighty melody. ‘Those are our forces coming, son,’ his father says, taking him by the hand. ‘Let us advance to meet them.’ ”

Rajmond’s dream, like Andri’s, calls, summons to the struggle. Yet—how the two differ!

In Sigismund Rajewski the author personifies the Party’s leadership—wise, friendly, tactful, untiring—of the younger generation.

“How I respect and love you, Father!”—this thought of Rajmond’s, so expressive of the tie binding the two generations, might with equal truth have been expressed by any other of the young people portrayed in the novel. From Andri to Olesya, they all look up to the elder Rajewski as to an exacting friend and loving father.

Ostrovsky attributed tremendous importance to the portrayal of the leader of the Party underground. It is by Rajewski’s absence that he explains the young people’s loss of vigilance, and the tragic situation to which it leads them, at the end of the first book of the novel: “Had Sigismund Rajewski been with them in the lodge, the Countess could not have succeeded in escaping, and they would not have been betrayed.” That, of course, is quite true.

In the years of Rajewski's imprisonment his wife, Jadwiga, striving to provide for herself and their little boy, gives up her work for the Party. Rajewski, on his return, though understanding perfectly the reasons behind this state of affairs, cannot, of course, reconcile himself to its continuation. Nor does he make a secret of his attitude.

"I cannot judge you," he says, "for your withdrawal from the Party. The struggle is hard, and not all of our comrades have held high the Party banner through these years. Some have withdrawn, devoting all their thoughts and efforts to their families. To them, the loss of dear ones amounts to loss of self. But—how can you confine all of life to these four walls? Think of it, Jadwiga, and I know you will come back to us, my dearest, and find happiness again in the struggle."

Rajmond, Andri, Verba, Kovallo—every one of them would subscribe to these thoughts.

When the Presidium of the Board of the Soviet Writers' Union met in Ostrovsky's rooms to discuss the manuscript of *Born of the Storm*, many of those who spoke pointed out the author's increased mastery of his pen.

"Even the incidental characters are alive," Alexander Fadeyev declared, "and the language is better, more terse and vivid. . . . In theme, in depth of treatment, in subject matter, the new novel is a definite advance."

I shall limit myself here to a discussion of one of the central incidents of the novel—the scene in the boiler room. In these pages, unquestionably, Ostrovsky was at his best. The scene is so complete, so finished, that it stands examination from any point of view: composition, plot, dialogue, psychological truth of character development.

One of the chief attributes of this scene, it will be remembered, is the sound of the factory whistle—harsh, rousing, insistent—which Andri keeps going incessantly. Ostrovsky transforms this monotonous blast into a pliant element of composition, showing how differently it affects the different sections of the city, the different strata of society.

The entire scene focuses around Andri Ptakha—that same Andri whom Serafimovich has termed “magnificent”. And Andri is truly magnificent, particularly in this scene. Nowhere does Ostrovsky fall into the trap of melodrama, of penny-dreadful heroics. Every word, every line of the scene rings true, carrying on the main theme of the novel.

We have already been shown Andri’s fiery temperament, ready to blaze at the slightest provocation. People of such temperament are subject to swift changes of mood, particularly when events move rapidly around them. Ostrovsky does not picture Andri’s conduct in the boiler room as the result of lengthy deliberation, as a course of action planned out beforehand. That would have been altogether out of keeping with Andri’s character. No, the episode takes place as Andri’s instant reaction to the report that Polish gendarmes have killed the worker Glushko.

“For an instant or two Andri stood very still, gripped by a new idea.

“He hesitated, trying to shake it off. But it was too strong for him. His heart pounded as it might before a leap from a precipice. Another instant—and he sprang to the door, turned the key in the lock, and laid the key in his pocket. Returning to the boilers, he seized the whistle ring and jerked it down with all the weight of his body.”

Andri's comrades are frightened by his daring. It seems to them desperate, senseless, fraught with fearful consequences. They try to make him stop.

But Andri is entirely in the power of that "madness of the brave" which Gorky has sung, and which Ostrovsky, too, sings in this scene. He will hear no persuasion. He is ready for any sacrifice, ready to take any consequences.

"Seizing the crowbar in both hands, his eyes blazing, his face black with coal dust, he shouted to his comrades:

" 'Get out through the emergency door! Get out quick, boys, do it for me! I'm going to keep the whistle blowing, to rouse the people. Come what may, I'll take it on myself. Get out, boys, before I take this crowbar to you! Quick!'

"He swung up the bar. The stokers rushed for the emergency exit."

He is good to look at, Andri Ptakha, in these grim moments; and Ostrovsky paints him for us vividly. But we are shown, too—and this is essential to the further development—that Andri, intoxicated by his own daring and by his eagerness for the heroic, does not even realise the danger he is in.

"Andri did not notice the danger until a shot sounded at the window and a bullet whizzed past his head. Involuntarily, his hand let go the whistle ring. The blast broke off."

As the unequal battle continues, and the band of armed cutthroats launches attack after attack against the lone young daredevil, Ostrovsky skilfully traces Andri's swift changes of mood, conditioned by the changing situation.

The whistle blast strikes loud on the ear of Count Edward Mogelnicki and brings him hurrying to the headquarters of the Polish legion, tense with anger, full of uneasy premonition.

At the opposite end of the social scale the blast is heard with very different feelings. This Ostrovsky describes with stern restraint:

“What was happening in the boiler room was eagerly followed by all the workers confined in the factory courtyard. Every heart was with the lone fighter whose desperate daring kept the armed legionaries at bay. In his stubborn resistance these glum, work-worn people sensed reproach to their passivity. And the whistle would not let them forget it, not for a moment. Every one of them was now deeply concerned for Ptakha’s safety.”

In a third group, too, the blast is heard—in the underground. Here, the situation Ostrovsky describes is particularly dramatic.

Rajmond is compelled to tell Olesya, Andri’s beloved, what is happening in the boiler room. To Olesya, aside from all personal feeling, one thing is clear: a comrade is in trouble, and he must be helped.

“How can that be, Rajmond?” she demands. “Why was he left alone? What can he do, all by himself?”

Rajmond realises Andri’s situation, feels the reproach that sounds in Olesya’s words. But he cannot undertake a rescue for Andri. The workers’ uprising has been set for the coming night. There can be no armed sallies before the appointed time without the permission of the Party leadership.

Rajmond goes to his father.

"Give us permission. . . . There will be more comrades here soon, from the settlement. They all know Andri. Allow us to get him out."

But Sigismund Rajewski answers:

"We have no cartridges yet. And we must not split our forces."

Adding to the tension of the situation, the whistle suddenly breaks off. What can that mean? The end? Andri's death? Olesya bursts into tears. But even now Ostrovsky's severe realism saves the scene from the slightest hint of melodrama; and the tension is quickly lifted by the appearance of Ptakha in the doorway.

Ostrovsky succeeded in writing only the first of the three books in which *Born of the Storm* was planned. The breadth of his intentions in this trilogy may be judged from his own brief summary of the story:

"The second book will deal with the gathering of the Pilsudski forces, their seizure of a part of the Ukraine, and their bloc with Petlyura, who in the end sold out to them completely; and, on the other side of the barricades, the organisation of the Red Army out of small partisan detachments, the struggle of the peasantry against the landlords, the spontaneous uprisings which grew, under Bolshevik leadership, into a movement of the entire people against the foreign invaders, and the Red Army's victories over Petlyura's bands.

"The third book will show the intervention, now altogether unmasked, launched by the Entente as represented by landlord and capitalist Poland. The heroic resistance put up by the Twelfth Army—ragged, half barefoot, small in number. Thirteen thousand, as against sixty thousand warmly dressed and splendidly armed Polish soldiers.

"The Poles seize Kiev. The Polish bourgeoisie are triumphant. But the steel fist of the Cavalry Army gathers near Uman. A blow of frightful force—and the Poles retreat.

"Our victorious offensive, and the expulsion of the interventionists from the Ukraine."

The characters of the novel were to be shown as participants in these historic events, maturing and growing steeled in the struggle.

And the author himself lived the story with his characters.

"I'm constantly thinking of these people, so close, so dear to me," he often said.

ALWAYS IN THE RANKS

In all Ostrovsky's works, complete or incomplete, even in the plans that death prevented him from carrying through, we sense so tremendous a vital energy that it is hard to speak of all this as his "literary heritage"—that funereal term! No, I should call it not a heritage, but an active arsenal of ideas and characters, an arsenal that remains effective to this day.

Nor does this apply only to the novels, *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Born of the Storm*. Of no small significance in Ostrovsky's arsenal are his speeches and articles, so closely connected and interconnected with his novels that, all together, they form one integral whole.

Like his novels, they are not many, these speeches and articles. But the power, the passion, the conviction ringing in his every word, the clarity of his insight, forge not only his public statements, but even his private letters, into a mighty weapon.

The earliest of Ostrovsky's articles appeared in 1934, after the publication of *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

In them we meet the same "hero" as in Ostrovsky's novels, with the difference that in his novels Ostrovsky portrayed this hero, and in his other writings propagandised him, concretised him in one aspect or another. The youth, trained by the Communist Party—there is his "hero".

In Ostrovsky, as man and as writer, word and deed were never at variance.

"A writer cannot stand aside from life, from struggle," he declared. "... Only he who marches in the ranks of the foremost, ablaze with the fervour of the struggle, he whose heart bleeds at every defeat, who rejoices in every victory, with our whole people—only he can write a book that will be stirring and truthful, a book that will be a call. Our literature is the literature of truth, the socialist truth of mankind's present and future." Stirring, truthful, calling—Ostrovsky's own speeches, articles, and letters, no less than his novels, illustrate the truth of these words.

"The most wonderful thing a man could wish," Ostrovsky wrote, "is that his works may continue to serve mankind even when he himself has ceased to exist."

By the life he lived and the work he did, Ostrovsky earned himself this coveted destiny.

During the bitter ordeal of the last war, Ostrovsky's works made themselves felt with new and amazing power. Pavel Korchagin was a participant in battles fought all up and down the front, from the Black Sea to the Barents. Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya called him her friends; so did Oleg Koshevoi, and Alexander Matrosov, and the soldiers who raised the Banner of Victory over the Reichstag in Berlin. Flyer Ivan Kozhedub, thrice Hero of the Soviet Union, read *How the Steel Was Tempered* many times over, and loved Korchagin, as he declared, more than anyone else he had ever encountered in books.

Soviet writers, in their books on the war, often mention Korchagin, treating him as a factor in the life of the period. We meet him in Alexander Fadeyev's *The*

Young Guard and Boris Polevoi's *Story of A Real Man*, in Pyotr Pavlenko's *Happiness* and Ilya Ehrenburg's *Storm*, in Vera Panova's *Kruzhilikha* and Oles Gonchar's *Standard-Bearers*.

Ostrovsky's works strode across borders and frontiers. Korchagin fought the fascists in the battles of Warsaw and Tirana, Budapest and Prague, Sofia and Vienna. "The soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army carried this book with them in their battles for liberty," reads the inscription on a copy of *How the Steel Was Tempered* received from China by the Ostrovsky Museum in Moscow.

In our day, too, Korchagin fights on in the forward lines. He is one of the builders of our post-war development, one of the fighters for peace the world over, for happiness for all the working people of our globe.

When the Volga-Don Canal was being built, reporters wrote of the red star fixed to a walking excavator named for Nikolai Ostrovsky.

Ostrovsky—the name is carried by locomotives, by planes, by tanks, by steamers, by harvester combines.

Streets and schools, libraries and parks, theatres and Young Pioneer clubhouses carry the name of Ostrovsky.

During college entrance examinations many young people write compositions on Nikolai Ostrovsky, whom they term, "an immortal agitator for life and happiness on earth". Lecturers speak of Nikolai Ostrovsky as of a bard of courage and patriotism. Young Communist Leaguers hold discussions on Ostrovsky's famed lines, "Man's dearest possession is life". Ostrovsky is cited and quoted in the most varied circumstances.

In the People's Democracies, too, the youth find in Ostrovsky's books a leader, a hero, on whom to model themselves. It was the Pavel Korchagin team that took

first place among the builders of Dimitrovgrad—Bulgarian “youth city”. Korchagin helped the builders of the giant iron and steel plant at Nowa Huta to overcome hardships and difficulties; and they named *How the Steel Was Tempered* as “our favourite book”. The life of Korchagin inspired young Germans working on a dam in the Erzgebirge Mountains.

It is hardly a matter of chance that Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* ends in a passage from *How the Steel Was Tempered*.

“In spite of all the mistakes that we might have made,” Nehru writes, “we have saved ourselves from triviality and an inner shame and cowardice. That, for our individual selves, has been some achievement.

“Man’s dearest possession is life, and since it is given to him to live but once ...” and so to the end of the passage.

Mayakovsky, one of the great poets of our century, wrote in his poem *To Comrade Nette—Steamer and Man* these lines on the immortality of Soviet people:

We advance
 through the barking of guns
And,
 dying,
 take new shape
In steamers,
 in lines of print,
 and in other lasting things.

Ostrovsky has taken shape in lines of print, and in steamers, and in a multitude of other "lasting things". And in that lies his immortality.

